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# Indian Society In The Eighteenth Century

# INDIAN SOCIETY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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# Publisher's Note

V.P.S. RAGHUVANSHI was born in Etah in 1919 and died at the age of 47 years in 1965. Educated at the University of Allahabad from where he took M.A. and D. Phil. degrees, Dr. Raghuvansi specialized in modern Indian history for his post-graduate course and later took up the social history of the eighteenth century India for intensive research.

During the Second World War years when the National Library and other research institutions were closed, Dr. Raghuvanshi worked as C.G.O. in the Ministry of Defence. After the War, on the completion of his research work, he joined the teaching staff of B.R. College, Agra, and later shifted to the University of Sagaur, and then to Ramjas College, the University of Delhi. In Delhi he was associated with a research project on *A Bibliography of Modern Indian History*. In 1958 he joined the Department of History in the University of Rajasthan as Reader, where he continued to work till the 5th November, 1965. Dr. Raghuvanshi organized the teaching and research in modern Indian history at Rajasthan University. The University authorities have perhaps recognized this by instituting an annual Raghuvanshi memorial lecture and by opening a Raghuvanshi memorial library.

Dr. Raghuvanshi was an exceptionally brilliant teacher, a lively conversationalist, and a painstaking researcher. But he belonged to that band of scholars who read more but wrote very little. Dr. Raghuvanshi wrote only one book, *The Indian National Thought and Movement*, that too at a very early age. Indeed he wrote a large number of articles, including a series on the eighteenth century Bengal, Sati and infanticide. His latest and the last, *State Policy in India and Secularism*, which he was to have read in a seminar organized by the All-India Law Institute, has been published posthumously.

This book is Dr. Raghuvanshi's doctoral thesis. He delayed its publication as he intended to write a comprehensive social history of India during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He had collected copious materials from both archival and private repositories; but, alas, the fate willed otherwise.

# Contents

# Abbreviations Used for References

*Araish-i-Mahfil*, for Araish-i-Mahfil by Sher Ali Jafari "Afsos"—an Urdu work translated by Major Court. Calcutta MDCC LXXXII.

Abbe de Guyon: *History*, for A New History of the East Indies, 2 Vols., London, 1757.

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Dow: *Indostan*, for The History of Indostan by Alexander Dow, 2 Vols., London, 1770-1772.

Dubois: *Hindu Manners*, for Description of the Character, Manners, and Customs, etc., of Hindus by Abbe J. A. Dubois. Ed. by Beauchamp, Oxford, 1897.

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# Introduction

THE POLITICAL conditions of India in the eighteenth century sharply reflect the weaknesses of the structure of society. The decadence of the Mughal monarchy after the death of Aurangzeb stirred the dormant feudal elements in the country and led to the formation of independent feudal states. The thirty years of Muhammad Shah, Louis XV of the Empire, from vigorous youth to the paralytic old age, are a story of the ruin of the Empire. During this period, the provinces of Oudh, Bengal, Hyderabad and the Carnatic became almost separate independent Muslim states. In 1739 when the Persian adventurer, Nadir Shah, sacked the Imperial capital, the Mughal Government as a political institution was a mere pretence. In the preceding period, the Peshwas had succeeded in snatching a substantial part of the authority of the Mughal crown. The rich provinces of Malwa and Gujarat had passed under the control of the Poona Government. Muhammad Shah even recognized the right of Baji Rao to levy tribute on the Rajput states up to the Jamuna. In 1737, the bold Peshwa was himself encamped near the capital and caused consternation in the ranks of the Muslim nobility. Nizam-ul-Mulk, the Subadar of the Deccan, resolved to curb his ambitions, but his defeat and humiliating peace at Bhopal in February 1738 plainly demonstrated the superior political and military strength of the Maratha power. In the period before 1750 the trend of political events was decisively in favour of the Maratha chiefs who had been able to rally the communal forces of Hinduism under their leadership. It appeared as if the Raja of Satara would succeed to the Imperial legacy of the Timurid princes. The prospect of a Maratha Empire over India was not merely an illusion. About 1750, the dominion of the Maratha, which was controlled from Poona, stretched from the banks of the Ganges to the outskirts of Mysore. In the later period, however, the active intervention of Europeans in the internal politics gave a different complexion to the struggle for supremacy among the different Maratha feudal groups. The

defeat of the Maratha confederacy at the hands of Afghans in 1761 at Panipat also belied the dream of a universal Maratha Empire. Later on the political unity of the confederacy was impaired by the ambitions and rivalries of the ruling families of Scindhia, Holkar, Gaikwar and Bhonsla. They owed only a nominal allegiance to the Peshwa at Poona. The main interest of the later period centres round the development of the British power and the integration of small states under the British hegemony.

In the later 18th century, India witnessed a clear and direct clash between two social systems different in political consciousness, legal conceptions, and economic structure. The Europeans struggling for dominating the Indian trade had a superior genius for organized political work which the Indian leaders did not possess. Politically, Indian society was under the control of a decadent feudalism, while the Western society was dominated by an aggressive, enterprising mercantilism or commercial capitalism. Ultimately, the Indian feudal political structure succumbed to the unscrupulous political drive of the growing Western capitalism. The Indo-European clash of arms at the battle-field of Plassey in June 1757 demonstrated that in the new world forces, the old medieval feudal civilizations of Asia had become obsolete. The rapidity with which the European commercial settlements in India became military cantonments, and the European became a soldier and statesman, a merchant and diplomat all together, indicates the superior vitality of European society. By the middle of the 18th century, India's home front had completely collapsed, and the foreigners realized that the disturbed political conditions were injurious to their extra-territorial and commercial interests. They guaranteed the security of their trade by bold ventures in internal politics. The rivalries between the two rising colonial Powers, England and France, provided an additional urge to them to take part in Indian politics and exploit the weaker states in their interest. The triangular contest for power between England, France, and the Maratha states was, however, a prolonged process. In South India, the emergence of Mysore as a strong state under Hyder Ali added to the complexities of the contest. With the phenomenal success of England in Bengal in the next few years following the battle of Plassey, the scales were definitely turned against the French for

ever in India. When the peace of Paris was about to be concluded on February 10, 1763, Clive could write to Lord Bute that the Company "wholly attached to mercantile ideas" was obliged "to draw the sword" resulting in successes "so great that we have accomplished for ourselves and against the French exactly everything that the French intended to accomplish for themselves and against us".[1] In the next decade, the progress of the East India Company as a big territorial power in India was rapid. By the Mughal grant of 1765, secured after the great victory at Buxar, the British hold over Bengal and Bihar was legalized. The Company also acquired as a free gift the Northern Circars consisting of the five districts of Chicacole, Rajahmundry, Ellore, Condapilly, and Guntur. They were later held by the Company subject to an annual tribute of 9 lacs of rupees to the Subadar of the Deccan. The states of Oudh, Carnatic and Hyderabad, and the petty chiefs adjoining them virtually passed under the protection of the British arms. In the period of Warren Hastings' Governor-Generalship, there was further extension of the British authority through direct administration and the British power passed through fiery ordeal and emerged triumphant. The Maratha confederacy was broken, and the ambitions of Hyder Ali were frustrated. When Wellesley landed in India in April 1798, he resolved on crushing every threat which the Maratha states and the state of Mysore still held out to British power. Of the other two big states, Oudh was tightly in the British grip, and Hyderabad, alienated by Shore's attitude, was not difficult to manage. By a series of treaties with the Indian states, he aimed at making the Company the sole arbiter in the internal politics and virtually the paramount power. The Nizam was offered protection and guarantee of his territories. The state of Mysore was isolated by a renewal of the alliance with the Peshwa made in the time of Cornwallis. He succeeded in carrying out a political readjustment of Southern India after the defeat of Tipu. The Nawab of Carnatic and the Raja of Tanjore were pensioned off and their territories constituted the Madras presidency directly administered by British officers. By the end of the eighteenth century, the East India Company was the paramount power in South India, with the

[1] Beveridge: *A Comprehensive History of India, II* p. 207.

states brought within a clear ring of vassalage, and with the Company's territories having increased considerably. In Northern India, he snatched about half of the territories of the Nawab of Oudh, and extended British power nearly to the gates of Delhi. The rich Gangetic plain was the frontier dividing the realms of the Company and the Maratha Empire. The relations of the great proconsul with the Marathas were not very successful and were of one long-drawn-out contest. But he left the East India Company as an Imperial power, and paralysed the "hydra-headed" confederacy of the Marathas. In the later period, after a brief lull of non-intervention, and administrative consolidation of British power, as a consequence of the exploits of Marquess of Hastings (1813-1823), the Nepal War, the Pindari War, the third Maratha War, the political map of India was almost coloured red. The Peshwa's dominions were annexed and Baji Rao was pensioned. The development of the British power in the later period till 1857 has merely a territorial significance. By 1823, the country as a whole had felt the social and economic consequences of the British rule.

The consummation of British rule through stages of development in the second half of the 18th century is an inevitable historical phenomenon. It overtook the feudal state system of the country, which was too heterogeneous in class composition to offer vigorous resistance to the foreigners. It subjected to disintegration of a society which had suffered from acute divisions and was demoralized into inertia by an orthodox reactionary priestly community and degenerate aristocracy. The social interpretation of British political success fully establishes the static, unprogressive character of Indian social organization in contrast to the active, vigorous and dynamic character of the Western society. The feudal politico-economic structure of society, which caste and religion strengthened, proved feeble in its encounter with the representatives of a mercantile body. The triumph of European capitalism over Indian feudalism shook the old structure of society and caused incalculable misery and suffering to the people under the initial impact. The following lines of the English poet, Cowper, beautifully depict the changes his countrymen brought about in India and their influence on England:

*Hast thou, though suckled at fair freedom's breast,*
*Exported slavery to the conquered East?*
*Pulled down the tyrants India served with dread,*
*And raised thyself, a greater in their stead?*
*Gone thither, armed and hungry, returned full,*
*Fed from the richest veins of the Mogul,*
*A despot big with power ordained by wealth,*
*And that obtained by rapine and by stealth?*
*With Asiatic vices stored thy mind,*
*But left their virtues and thine own behind?*
*And having trucked thy soul, brought home the fee*
*To tempt the poor to sell himself to thee?*

## *Politico-Economic Structure of Society*

In the 18th century, the wild scramble for power subjected people to the despotism of militant aristocracies and intensified feudalism. Besides the powerful class of the ancient Rajput ruling houses, new fangled feudal territorial nobility multiplied like mushrooms. The Indian states of the modern period ruled over by the Maratha, Jat, Sikh and Muslim chiefs are the creations of the troubled epoch of the 18th century. The system of assigning fiefs or *Jagirs* to the *Amirs* and nobles, and investing them with military and civil functions, was a salient feature of Indian administration, and it encouraged a tremendous growth of feudal aristocracy in society. By lavish grants of *Jagirs*, the Mughals had created a powerful bureaucracy which was semi-official and feudal in character. When the authority of the Mughal crown declined and the law of escheat was relaxed in application, the owners of *Jagirs* set up virtually as hereditary landed chiefs. They exercised executive and judicial authority which gave them a highly privileged position over others, and they could easily defy or override the rule of law.[1] The Peshwas followed the example of the Mughals, and the growth of powerful feudal elements within the Maratha Empire sapped its internal vitality though its external union was "cemented by common country, common interests, and common enmity" to the English.[2] The feudal chiefs were the strongest class in society

[1] *Seventh Report:* Committee of Secrecy, 1773, p. 324.
[2] Elphinstone: *Report on the Territories Conquered from the Peshwa*, p. 17.

everywhere. An Englishman visiting Orissa in the year 1766 at the orders of Lord Clive describes the feudal chiefs as "the giants of the feudal ages".[1] According to Sir George Forrest, in the pre-British period, the "local princes of the Deccan were the Jahgirdars, or owners of Jahgirs, which, both in nature and history, had a strong resemblance to feudal beneficences ... The Jahgirs, as in Europe, came in course of time to be regarded in the light of hereditary property".[2] Elphinstone, as Commissioner of the Deccan, strongly pressed the British Government to confirm them. About them he wrote:

> "I recommend that all grants by the Mughal Emperors, or the Rajahs of Satara, should be hereditary in the fullest sense of the word. The former must generally have been very long in the families which held them, and had survived two changes of dynasty. These do not seem now to be interfered with, the latest of the Satara grants must now be near a century old, and must have survived a change of dynasty, besides our conquest .... The Jahgirdars of the Peshwa stood on a different footing. They had arisen under the dynasty which we subverted; none could have been in possession for more than seventy years .... Much consideration was, however, due to them as the actual possessors of power; and they were allowed to retain their private lands for one or more generations, according to their merits or importance. No change has taken place in the condition of this class: and I cannot see how any claim which they possessed at the conquest has been weakened since."[3]

In the pre-British period, the Hindu Rajas of Bengal are mentioned as a very powerful class. In 1754 Col. Scott wrote that they "secretly wished for a change and opportunity of throwing off the tyrannical yoke" of the Muslim Government.[4] After perusing the accounts of the period, the impression left on one's mind is that the landed nobility was the strongest single class holding the masses like chattel under its claws. In a feudal society both power and prosperity are concentrated on this dominant minority. In the times of Jehangir, the Dutch

[1] *Asiatic Annual Register for 1799*, Miscellaneous Tracts, pp. 50-1.
[2] Forrest: *Selections from the Writings of Elphinstone*, p. 58.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 58-9. [4] Hill: *Bengal, 1856-57, III*, p. 328.

traveller Pelsaert observed: "In the palaces of the lords dwells all the wealth there is, wealth which glitters indeed, but is borrowed, wrung from the sweat of the poor."[1] Late in the 17th century, Bernier made a similar statement that the poor people had no protection from the laws, that those who could not discharge the demands of their rapacious lords "were not only deprived of the means of subsistence but were bereft of their children, who are carried away as slaves."[2] According to him, the great ones were in the enjoyment of everything "by dint of the Korrah (lash), and by dint of money".[3] Here is an account of their inimitable grandeur:

> "They maintain the splendour of the Court, and are never seen out of doors but in the most superb apparel; mounted sometimes on an elephant, sometimes on horse-back, and not unfrequently in a Paleky (palanquin) attended by many of their cavalry, and by a large body of servants on foot, who take their station in front, and at either side, of their lord, not only to clear the way, but to flap the flies and brush off the dust with tails of peacocks; to carry the picquedent or spittoon, water to allay the Omrah's thirst, and sometimes account books, and other papers."[4]

The foreign accounts of the 18th century agree in emphasizing that on account of the despotic powers wielded by the feudal chiefs, there was nothing like an impartial honest administration of justice. They condemn the Indian systems of government as tyrannical under which people could not prosper and were condemned to a debasing state of slavery. On account of the disruption of the Mughal Empire, in the 18th century, the territorial chiefs usurped in their hands dictatorial powers and administration deteriorated. There is no doubt that many Princes governed their subjects on humane principles and that people flourished under their beneficent rule.[5] But in an age in which political revolutions were frequent, oppression and extortion necessarily flowed from governmental activity. Ghulam Hussain, the Muslim historian of Bengal, cor-

[1] Pelsaert: *Remonstrantie*, pp. 54-5.
[2] Bernier: *Travels in the Mogul Empire*, p. 205.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 252. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 213-14.
[5] Craufurd: *Sketches*, pp. 89-90. Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 91.

roborates the reflections of the foreigners by stating at length how the decline of the Empire was the "loot" of its citizens by "an infinity of evil doers, who plague the Indian world, and grind the face of the wretched inhabitants". He characterizes the 18th century as "an age of senseless, slothful princes, and of Grandees, ignorant and meddling," under whom "the Sun of justice and Equity . . . at least entirely set in the Occident of ignorance, imprudence, violence and civil wars". He writes:

> "It is in consequence of such wretched administrations that every part of Hind has gone to ruin, and every one of its discouraged inhabitants have broken their hearts. Life itself is become disgustful to most. So that, on comparing the present times with the past, one is apt to think that the world is overspread with blindness, and that the earth is totally overwhelmed with an everlasting darkness."[1]

About the Muslim government in Bengal, we have the following testimony of Scrafton:

> "With respect to the executive part depending on power, the government of the Moors borders so near on anarchy. You would wonder how it keeps together; here every man maintains as many armed men as the state of his finances will admit, and the degree of submission is proportioned to the means of resistance; and the grand mystery of their politics is to foment this disunion."[2]

Robert Orme, a member of Madras Council in the fifties of the 18th century, pronounces a severe indictment on India's feudal governments. In his opinion, the authority of the monarchy was eclipsed by baronial ascendancy in the internal political life, and there were no codes of laws uniformly observed in the country.[3] The wealthy and influential upper classes could purchase justice by bribery in their own interests.[4] The autocratic chiefs exercised power in many cases in the most oppressive manner. He cites the case of a wealthy banker at Murshidabad, who was thrown into a dungeon on a fabricated charge of murder, and who "compromised the price of his liberty, and the remission of his pretended crime, for the sum of fifty thousand rupees".[5]

[1] *Sier-Mutaqherin, III*, pp. 160-61. [2] Scrafton: *Reflections*, pp. 29-30.
[3] Orme: *Fragments of the Mogul Empire*, p. 437.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 444-45. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 449-50.

He makes the following comments on the vicious administrative circle:

"Every head of a village calls his habitation the Durbar and plunders of their meal and roots the wretches of his precinct: from him the Zemindar extorts the small pittance of silver, which his penurious tyranny has scrapped together. The Fouzdar seizes upon the greatest share of the Zemindar's collections, and then secures the favour of his Nabob by voluntary contributions, which leave him not possessed of the half of his rapines and exactions. The Nabob fixes his rapacious eye on every portion of wealth which appears in his province... subject to such oppressions, property in Indostan is seldom seen to descend to the third generation."[1]

Even the Peshwas, the founders of Hindu Swaraj, condemned as a "cabal of Brahmans", "slaves of avarice, and, in one word, strangers to every sentiment that can ennoble the human mind".[2] Under their rule, Elphinstone says, "a greater distinction was made in the punishment, on account of the caste of the criminal than the nature of the crime."[3] There may be exaggeration in these accounts, but it can be easily appreciated that society under militant feudal aristocracies and their power-politics was politically demoralized. The European accounts point to the cold indifference of the masses towards their governments. The degenerate character of feudal politics and class divisions, encouraged by caste and religion, demoralized both the rulers and the ruled, and the country may have welcomed the foreigner. "The want of the Union of the natives appears one of the strongest foundations of our power", truly states Malcolm, "it has certainly contributed beyond all others to its establishment."[4] The other writers have observed that the people were politically a dead sea of humanity. "In a government like that of India", says Alexander Dow, "public spirit is never seen, and loyalty is a thing unknown. The people permit themselves to be transferred from one tyrant to another."[5]

[1] Orme: *op. cit*, pp. 450-51.
[2] *Asiatic Annual Register for 1799*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 124.
[3] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 53.
[4] Malcolm: *Memoir, II*, Appendix xviii, p. 434.
[5] Dow: *Indostan, I*, xii. See also Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 32.

William Henry Tone who served in the Peshwa's armed forces, says that the Hindus considered misfortune as their fate; they had few passions, and submitted to every authority without a struggle.[1] In 1800, the Duke of Wellington boldly asserted: "As for the wishes of the people, particularly in this country (India), I put them out of the question. They are the only philosophers about their governors that ever I met with—if indifference constitutes that character."[2] This indifference of the people was fatal to the political interests of the society, and was a sequel to the domination exercised over society by morally degraded, selfish, ambitious ruling chiefs and their cliques.

The feudal political structure of society was certainly injurious to the economic interests of the people. It primarily catered for the interests of the Chief who owned land and ruled, and the priest who promoted religion and interpreted the law. The vast body of mercantile classes, artists, and working classes merely lived on sufferance. The institution of caste strengthened the feudal order of things and organized society in the interests of the nobility and the priestly community. We should not be surprised at the following comments of the French missionary on the character of Hindu feudal administration in South India:

> "The authority of the Hindu princes, as well as that of the vile emissaries whom they keep in the several provinces of the country for the purpose of harassing and oppressing them in their name, being altogether despotic, and knowing no other rule but their own arbitrary will, there is nothing in India that resembles a Court of justice. Neither is there a shadow of public right, nor any code of laws by which those who administer justice may be guided. The civil power and the judicial are generally united, and exercised in each district by the collector or receiver of the imposts ... They are generally Brahmans."[3]

He tells us how the structure of society was especially hard on the lower classes who specialized in the different arts and industrial professions. They were poor, ignorant, and degraded

[1] *Asiatic Annual Register for 1799*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 131.

[2] Sastri: *Munro System of British Statesmanship*, Appendix C., p. 293.

[3] Mill: *History of British India, I*, footnote, p. 200.

in status. Their talents received poor encouragement from society.[1]

## *Socio-Economic Structure*

To the foreigner Indian society appeared to be a totalitarian organization with highly developed community life under the dictatorship of caste. The social and economic interests of the different groups were regulated and rigidly controlled through social institutions of caste, family, and religion. The social code of ethics had become identical with the special interests of society in respect of these institutions and left the individual with a little personal freedom. His destiny in society was more or less predetermined. It is also emphasized that society was organized wholly in the interests of the top-privileged groups and caste and it perfected a machinery for social and cultural dominance of the majority by the high caste minority. As for the rules of caste in relation to religion, marriage and family, they were enforced by the councils of caste or chiefs of castes. The institution of caste was also co-ordinating the interests of industrial production in society. European observers of the 18th century generally emphasize that caste system served a great purpose by regulating the profession that each individual was destined to follow. All the trades and professions were almost hereditary, and arranged on perfect class basis. In the opinion of the French missionary, Dubois, the institution of caste was the happiest effort of Hindu legislation which prevented the people from sinking into barbarism. While the rest of Asia was "plunged in that dreary gulf, India kept up her head, preserved and extended the sciences, the arts, and civilization".[2] The odious features of the institution in distributing the economic interests of society among the different classes on monopolistic basis, in carrying the distinctions of high and low in trades too far, and in eliminating free competition among the different groups, thus stereotyping the progress of society, too, deserve to be noted in connection with the economic structure of society.

A significant feature of the socio-economic structure of society

[1] Dubois: *Hindu Manners*, p. 64.

[2] Beveridge: *History of India, II*, pp. 14-5.

was its self-sufficient and autonomous character. It had the necessary resources to function without state intervention. It had a sensitive conscience for organized life and active public opinion to restrain people from breaking social laws. Its social institutions were fully developed to ensure full discharge of social responsibilities and duties by its members. If it was insensitive to radical reforms and progress, it was well organized for survival. The contemporary writers draw our attention to the fact that in spite of the frequency of political revolutions, and the arbitrary, autocratic feudal political set-up, Indian society continued to be governed on the basis of its social institutions, customs and usages. Society guarded itself against violent internal schisms and disruptions without the mediation of elaborate courts and the process of suits of law. It controlled life in the villages and towns through community organizations, Courts of *Punchayaet*, and caste tribunals. These institutions continued to be in force even in the Company's territories in the first quarter of the 19th century but their vitality was impaired as their jurisdiction was not recognized by the alien legal system. It is difficult to disagree with Ramsay Macdonald who said that the Britishers "have destroyed in Indian social life all those courts of arbitration, all those offices, which had, as one of their functions, the settlement of personal disputes. We have thus driven the people to the pleader and the Barrister and the law courts".[1] European writers of the early 19th century fully endorse his view. Dubois pays a glowing tribute to the working of the caste councils:

> "Without any of the judicial forms invented by the spirit of chicanery in Europe; with no advocates, solicitors, or other blood-suckers, now become necessary adjuncts of a court of justice in Europe; the Hindus determine the greater part of their suits of law by the arbitration of friends, or of the heads of the caste, or, in cases of the very highest importance, by reference to the chiefs of the whole castes of the district assembled to discuss the matter in controversy. In ordinary questions they generally apply to the chief of the place, who takes upon himself the office of justice of the peace, and accommodates the matter between the parties."[2]

[1] See Augustus Somerville: *Crime and Religious Beliefs in India.*

[2] Mill: *op. cit.*, footnote, p. 200.

Malcolm also tells us:

"The municipal and village institutions of India are competent, from the power given them by the common assent of all ranks in the country, to maintain order and peace within their respective circles. Their local authorities have been cherished or neglected, according to the despotism of the sovereign. But as far as we can trace the history of Central India, their rights and privileges have never been contested, even by the tyrants and oppressors who slighted them; while, on the other hand, all just princes have founded their chief reputation and claim to popularity on attention to them."[1]

The village community organization has been spoken of as the very soul of corporate life in the rural areas which sheltered the teeming millions. On its working under Maratha rule, Elphinstone remarks:

"These communities contain in miniature all the materials of a state within themselves, and are almost sufficient to protect their members, if all the other governments were withdrawn. Though probably not comparable with a very good form of government, they are excellent remedy for the imperfections of a bad one; they prevent the bad effects of its negligence and weaknesses, and even present some barriers against its tyranny and rapacity."[2]

The village "townships" were "the indestructible atoms, from an aggregate of which the most extensive Indian empires are composed".[3] In his evidence before the Select Committee of the House of Commons 1832, Charles Metcalfe offered a strong plea for the great usefulness of the village communities, "little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations".

In periods of severe strain on life in the rural areas, of pillage and devastation on a large scale, the villages were deserted, but after the storm was over, people returned and resumed their former life. Of the rural life in India, the villages were self-sufficient social and economic units, the centres of a simple rural handicraft economy and compact community life.[4]

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit. I*, p. 553. [2] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, pp. 20-1.
[3] Beveridge: *op. cit. II*, pp. 91-2.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 92, See also Mill: *op. cit.*, pp 216-18.

In the Indian villages and towns, the Courts of *Punchayet* were effective popular tribunals of judicial administration. A *Punchayet*, literally meaning a council of five, was composed of men of character and integrity and the *Punch* or the members were a "recognized and distinguished class of citizens."[1] In the dominions under the control of the Peshwas, they were generally selected by the government "with the approbation of the parties, and often at their suggestion".[2] The constitution of these Courts varied in different parts of the country and was free from defects. But they were of immense good to society and encouraged the ideals of public service. Malcolm says that "they were successful aids to good rule, or courageous opponents to bad one. Their power of being the latter was very considerable." He cites an interesting case in this connection in Central India:

> "A recent case occurred of a respectable President of a *Punchayet*, determining from his sense of an unjust measure to leave a town; and between two and three hundred of its wealthiest citizens so decidedly followed his example that oppression was stopped in its carrier and compelled to conciliate, by concession, an offended judge."[3]

The *Punchayet* system successfully counteracted the defects of a vicious administration and gave society the means of procuring justice for its members. The lower classes, which were necessarily neglected under the feudal governments, could through these indigenous courts "effect a tolerable dispensation of justice among themselves". According to Elphinstone, a *Punchayet* could not be corrupt or oppressive as public opinion exercised active control over it. It especially benefited the rural population. Under the superintendence of one man it could decide many cases and in a correct manner because it was personally acquainted with the character of the parties and their subjects in dispute. The judges were drawn from the people, and they acted on commonly accepted principles. There could be no "uncertainty and obscurity in the law", a fact which "struck at the very root of litigation." The membership of the *Punchayet* was variable and the possibility of venality quite remote, while its detection was very easy. Above all, these courts retained in

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit., II*, pp. 283, 286.
[2] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 78.
[3] Malcolm: *op. cit., II*, pp. 283-84.

a great degree the confidence of the people, and as Elphinstone points out, "they do not appear to have been unworthy of their good opinion." In his view, the *Punchayet* was an excellent method for the settlement of the disputes of the rural population.[1]

These Courts were of great service to the British Government in the early stages of its development. It is recorded that many complaints brought before the local British Officers were withdrawn the moment it was decided to submit them to a court of *Punchayet*.[2] The constitution of the village Courts was very simple. The village chief got a few of the intelligent and impartial men of his village and sat in judgment over the disputes. The submission of the parties in conflict was voluntary and the award of the *Punches* was in some cases confirmed and enforced by the Government. The revision of sentences by the government was very rare. The popular expression *Punch Permeshwar* shows that its decisions were always respected.[3] The ordeals were the common method by which complicated disputes were resolved. In the 18th century, the ordeals by fire, water, boiling oil, or oaths before the idols of deities were most common and have been mentioned by different European writers. In his report on the ceded districts of August 15, 1807, Col. Munro writes about the efficiency of the *Punchayet* system:

> "There can be no doubt that the trial of *Punchayet* is as much the common law of India in civil matters as that by jury is of England. No native thinks that justice is done when it is not adopted, and in appeal of causes formerly settled whether under a Native Government or under that of the Company previous to the establishments of the Courts, the reason assigned in almost every instance was that the decision was not given by a *Punchayet* but by a Public Officer or by persons acting under his influence or sitting in his presence. The Native who has a great cause always applied for a *Punchayet*, while he who has a bad one seeks the decision of a collector or a judge, because, he knows that it is much easier to deceive them. The natives cannot surely with any foundation be said to be judged

[1] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, pp. 91 2, 95.
[2] Malcolm: *op. cit. II*, pp. 292-95.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 78-82.

by their own laws, while the trial by *Punchayet* to which they have always been accustomed is done away."[1]

These institutions formed a vital part of the structure of society. They explain how in spite of the fierce clash of arms, life in society was not rent asunder, and the threads of social morality were not torn. With all its dark side, the 18th century remained to all intents and purposes an age of faith, virtue, and purity in social relationships for the common man although his ideals were challenged, his fortunes declined, his religion was attacked, his life was threatened by war and famine, he was not morally uprooted.

## *Unity of India's Social History*

India has been the home of a rich and varied civilization. It inspired men like Sir William Jones a noble amphitheatre, "enriched by the vast region of Asia", "the nurse of science, the inventress of delightful and useful arts, the scene of glorious actions, fertile in the productions of human genius, abounding in natural wonders, and infinitely diversified in the forms of religion, and government, in the laws, manners, customs, and languages, as well as in the features and complexions of men".[2] This was also the impression of the Arab savant, Al-Beruni, at the close of the 10th century when the furious Turkish generals quenched their thirst for conquest in the waters of the Ganges. The geographical environment which was constituted by Nature, in the words of Prof. Huxley as a "diamond on a pack of cards", having its north angle at Ladakh and the south at Cape Comorin, made India the home of a large population with a marked diversity in their social customs and religious practices, but the unifying factor of a common country shaped them into a distinct cultural entity from the rest of the world. Their social and cultural history shows a remarkable unity as also a continuity. It demonstrates the superior genius of the Indian people to conserve all that they have ever prized in the material and spiritual fulfilment of life. Their past achievements and failings are still preserved in

[1] Sastri: *Munro System of Statesmanship*, p. 243.
[2] Forbes: *Oriental Memoirs, I*, pp. 461-62.

their social organization, religious rites and ceremonies, in the legends of their literature and on the monuments of their art and architecture. The typical Indian mentality, its conservative social outlook, its dread of foreign contacts, pride in things rooted in the native soil, together with an aggressive cultural consciousness, has not undergone any vital change. A number of political and other factors brought about such a mentality in the early medieval period, and it is still prepotent. Al-Beruni writes that the conquests of Mahmud ruined the prosperity of the country and scattered Hindus like "atoms of dust" in all directions "and the antagonism between them and all foreigners receives more and more nourishment both from political and religious sources".[1] His remarks about Hindus' depreciation of Muslims represent a striking change in Hindu mentality which did not altogether vanish in the later ages. They called all foreigners *Mlechcha* i.e. impure and banned all relationships with them by inter-marriage, eating or drinking, thinking that they would be polluted. They did not permit any conversions to their religion. They also developed an aggressive cultural consciousness thinking that they had a monopoly of all the sciences and philosophies.[2]

These remarks agree with the reflections of Europeans about Hindus in the later periods. Manucci wrote about them in the later 17th century:

> "The first error of these Hindus is to believe that they are the only people in the world who have any polite manners; and the same is the case with cleanliness and orderliness in business. They think all other nations, and above all Europeans, are barbarous, despicable, filthy, and devoid of order."[3]

The leading features of social and religious life of the people hardly show material differences throughout the past ages. Their social organization is a continuous development of the institution of caste on lines which are still active in society. At the time of the Turkish conquest of India, the Muslims especially took note of the phenomenon of caste which distributed the people into different professional groups and did not permit the

[1] Al-Beruni: *India I*, edited by Prof. E.S. Sauchat, p. 22.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[3] Manucci: *Storia Do Mogor (1653-1708) III*, Translated by William Irvine, p. 37.

ideals of social equality work through inter-marriage or inter-dining without any regard to tribal or sectarian considerations. It is, however, clear that the rules of caste relating to marriage, dining, etc. shaped themselves gradually. *Ibn-i-Khurdadba*, an Arab traveller of the 10th century, writes that the Brahmans married the daughters of *Kshattriyas*,[1] though later, as Al-Beruni points out, inter-caste matrimonial relations between the two highest castes ceased to exist.[2] But he enumerates eight lower classes "who freely inter-marry with each other", the fuller, shoe-maker, juggler, the basket and shield-maker, the sailor, fisherman, the hunter of wild animals and of birds and the weaver.[3] This clearly denotes that in the earlier periods in the lower strata the institution of caste was not fully developed and professional stratification of the society on the basis of caste was not so complicated as in the later period. The Brahmans and Rajputs are mentioned as the high castes fully grown up.[4] The social distinctions between the twice-born high castes and the lower castes were, however, quite developed, and in this respect the most significant change has been the elevation of the status of the *Vaisyas*. About the 10th century, obviously a *Vaisya*, an artisan or a trader, was not reckoned in the high-caste group. Al-Beruni writes that the gates of higher learning were closed to all persons who were not of the twice-born castes—Brahmans or Rajputs. The recitation of the Vedas, saying prayers, and offering sacrifices to the fire were forbidden to a *Vaisya* and a *Sudra*. The violation of these customs was punished by cutting off the tongue.[5] The foreign writers of the early medieval period are also silent on the complex sub-caste structure of society. But by the time of the later Mughals, the institution of caste had grown to maturity and its ramifications into sub-castes were numerous. About the middle of the 17th century, Tavernier observed that the Hindus were five or six times more numerous than the Muslims and had no unity among themselves. The taboos of caste relating to food and drinks had acquired religious sanctity. According to him, the four castes mentioned in

[1] Elliot and Dowson: *History of India I*, p. 16.
[2] Al-Beruni's: *India, II*, p. 156.
[3] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 101. [4] Elliot and Dowson: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 6.
[5] Al-Beruni, *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 137, also *I*, p. 101.

the Scriptures had split into seventy-two castes.[1] In the early part of the 17th century we are informed that in Gujarat, the *Vaisyas* alone were divided into about 85 different sub-castes "that do not eat with one another".[2] In respect of marriage, Bernier tells us that inter-caste marriage was forbidden among the four traditional social groups.[3] The functions of the different castes, too, were understood clearly in society. In the reign of Jehangir, Pelsaert observed that in the lower sections of the population, caste was functioning as a hereditary corporation of craft "because a workman's children can follow no occupation other than that of their father, nor can they inter-marry with any other caste."[4] The caste psychology or caste-spirit was also perfectly developed. Munucci observes that "the Hindus suppose that when a man is above others in nobility of race, he also surpasses them in understanding."[5] The mere accident of birth was considered by them as expressive of the *Samscaras* of the individual.[6] The problem of the untouchables was also acute in society ever before. The foreigners expressed horror and bewilderment at the social degradation of a large part of society, contemptuously called *Chandals*. They were not allowed to enter the temples, draw water from the wells, and people of other castes would not even touch them. They were not allowed to live within the walled precincts of cities and villages. The social conception of theological contamination, *Chhut*, which prevented the lower orders from association with the high castes, resulted in artificial ceremonies of purification, remained in force rigorously from the medieval period. In the opinion of Al-Beruni, it represented "an innate perversity of the Hindu nature".[7]

The social institutions of marriage and family, and customs related to them have remained more or less the same throughout the medieval and modern periods. The Hindus considered marriage a sacred and necessary obligation of life and it is pointed out that in the higher groups, infidelity to marriage vows

[1] Tavernier: *Travels*, pp. 385-87.
[2] Hamilton: *Account of the East Indies I*, p. 248.
[3] Bernier: *op. cit.*, p. 325. [4] Pelsaert, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
[5] Manucci: *op. cit. III*, p. 74.
[6] Al-Beruni, *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 20, 185. [7] *Ibid.*

was rare.[1] Pelsaert says that on account of the system of child-marriage, grown-up maidens were not found in Hindu society and if old men married they had to marry young girls.[2] The foreign accounts also throw light on the fact that in daily concerns of life, the Muslims were imbibing Hindu customs, and the antagonism of creeds gave place to an appreciation of each other's customs and ways of life. In the early part of the 17th century, about the marriages of Muslims at Agra we are informed that marriage was usually "within the circle of friendship"—and inter-class marriages such as between soldiers and merchants were not common.[3] Theoretically the Muslim social organization did not favour hard and fast class divisions and distinctions. But the influence of the Hindu environment was strongly operative in their society. Their rites of family, and customs of marriage, and class composition were patterned after Hindu society. The Syeds, the Sheikhs, the Pathans, the Mughals, the Persians, etc., as well as the converted stock were all arranged into organized social groups.[4] By the 18th century, the similarities between the two communities almost obliterated the prominent distinctions inculcated by the rival systems of faith.

The unity is no less marked in India's religious history. During the period when the Rajputs were ascendant prior to the Turkish conquest, Hinduism, with its orthodox Vaishnavite and Shaivite cults, was the dominant creed of the country. Buddhism petered out and Jainism flourished mostly in the western parts of Gujarat. Bengal was the stronghold of Tantric Hinduism.[5] This is what we observe in the 18th century and later, so far as the Hindu population is concerned. The subsequent religious developments in Hinduism were within the fold of the orthodox cults—Vishnu and Siva dominating the Hindu pantheon. The sectarian divisions of the Hindus were ever very much unlike those of the Muslims or Christians, and there is little evidence of religious persecution or social acrimony in their relations. A superior religious consciousness over and above the sectarian feeling firmly prepossessed the Hindu mind, and Al-Beruni observed:

[1] Tavernier: *op. cit.*, p. 437; Manucci, *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 54.
[2] Pelsaert: *op. cit.*, p. 84. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 81.
[4] Manucci: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 453-54. [5] Al-Beruni: *op. cit.*, *I*, see preface.

"On the whole, there is very little disputing about theological topics among themselves; at the utmost they fight with words, but they will never stake their soul or body or their property on religious controversy."

He was astonished at the total absence of religious persecution and was impressed by the liberal character of Hinduism in accommodating every principle of life and every attitude of mind, from coarsest superstition to the sublime ideas about God and His creation.[1] The foreign observers of the later periods also emphasize the liberal and rational approach of the Hindu mind towards religion. When Bernier tried to convince the learned Brahmans of his day of the universality of the Christian faith, they mildly protested and said:

"We pretend not, that our law is of universal application. God intended it only for us, and this is the reason why we cannot receive a foreigner into our religion. We do not even say that yours is a false religion; it may be adapted to your wants and circumstances, God having, no doubt, many different ways of going to heaven."[2]

The important religious beliefs which mould the conduct of the Hindus and mark them off as a distinct religious entity, the spiritual bent of the Hindu mind, and the leading features of popular religion have undergone no radical transformation. It is instructive to follow the account of Hindu beliefs as given by the Arab scholar. Matter was the origin of the world. But they admitted the existence of a separate entity, *Atman*, *Purusha*, or *Jiva*, which was pure, stable and constant, and which existed apart from matter and gave life to matter. From this conception arose their faith in metempsychosis and *Moksha*. The Hindus believed that the whole world was a totality of 25 elements, the *Tattva* which can be classified into two categories: (a) Soul (*Purusha*); (b) Matter which could be further classified as follows:

i. *Avyakta* or absolute matter; ii. *Vyakta* or concrete matter; iii. *Ahankara* or nature; iv. *Mahabhuta* or five elements, heaven, wind, fire, water, or earth; v. *Pancha matras* i. e. functions of senses; vi. *Indriyani* or the five senses; vii. *Manas* or the will; viii.

[1] Al-Beruni: *op. cit., I*, pp. 19, 31. [2] Bernier: *op. cit.*, p. 328

*Karmedriyani* i.e. the sense of action or the five necessary functions.[1]

The soul comprehends the highest absolute intelligence, the totality of objects through a series of migrations or possibilities of existence whose number is unlimited. It gains experience from each migration and gathers new knowledge. The world, however, is not without direction and purpose and the goal of migration is *Moksha* or release of soul from matter. Al-Beruni writes:

> "Therefore the imperishable souls wander about in perishable bodies conformable to the difference of their actions, as they prove to be good or bad. The object of the migration through the world of reward is to direct the attention of the soul to the good, that it should become desirous of acquiring as much of it as possible. The object of its migration through the world of punishment (Hell) is to direct its attention to the bad and abominable, that it should strive to keep as far as possible aloof from it."

Knowledge is freedom of soul from matter. So long as it is clad in matter, it is contaminated by the turbid nature of matter. Its liberation from matter is its union with God, "and the return of soul as a knowing being into its own nature".[2] Those who aspire to seek liberation are to lead a life of virtue and renunciation and *Moksha* can be attained either in a single stage of metempsychosis or in several shapes. Al-Beruni writes that the following nine commandments were ordained by the religious laws for virtuous behaviour:

1. A man shall not kill; 2. Nor life; 3. Nor whore; 4. Nor steel; 5. Nor hoard up treasures; 6. Must practise holiness and purity; 7. Perform the prescribed fasting without any interruption and be poorly dressed; 8. Constantly adore God with praise and thanks; 9. Always have in mind the word *Om*, the word of creation, without pronouncing it.[3]

These explanations of the Hindu religious beliefs are repeated by the author of the *Dabistan*, the Persian traveller who lived in India for about thirty years in the 17th century. He observed the luxuriance of Hinduism in sects and doctrines but in each

[1] Al-Beruni, *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 40-4.
[2] *Ibid.*, *I* pp. 74-5.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

the distinction between spirit and soul was clearly emphasized. The external world was *Maya*, an illusion from which the soul was to strive for freedom. The material world infected the soul with all sorts of diseases and liberation from it could be possible through a life of religious purity—a life free from the pleasures of the world, and gratifications of the flesh. *Moksha*, the absolute liberation of soul from movement in time and space, in body and form, could be possible through a severe mode of life, through religious deeds and dissociation from the morbid matter by controlling the vile appetite.[1] Such beliefs encouraged humanitarian outlook in the individual and foreigners observed that in India animal life was not much molested.

The polytheistic structure of the Hindu religion which has taken the form of crude, vicious rites with the masses was ever the central point of foreign observation and criticism. Al-Beruni writes that the worship of the lower strata was degenerate, and that the masses were "kept in thraldom by all sorts of priestly tricks and deceipts". The educated Hindus held rational views, but the masses were the dupes of "the pre-concerted tricks of the priests".[2] The higher classes worshipped the Holy Trinity, Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, but the masses were lost in a chaotic structure of idolatry of *Daityas*, *Danava*, *Devas*, *Gandharvas*, *Pitras* (ancestors), *Bhutas*, *Siddha*, etc.—counting about 33,00,00,000 supernatural beings.[3] The popular belief in the *Avatars*, "radiant emanations of the Divine essence" and idols as different manifestations of God, was the basis of the entire structure of idolatry. The vicious atmosphere of worship in many Hindu temples, too, has been especially observed. According to Al-Beruni, the Hindu princes did not object to harlotry by the priests with the priestesses and the dancing women attached to the idol-temples. They were an additional "bait of pleasures for their subjects".[4] The European writers of the later periods, too, spoke eloquently on these dark patches of popular religion. They mention many indecent observances in celebrated temples to show the wickedness and impostures of the Hindu priests.[5]

[1] Fani: *The Dabistan I, or School of Manners*, pp. 2-8.
[2] Al-Beruni: *op. cit.*, pp. 122-23. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 90-3
[4] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 157.
[5] Bernier: *op. cit.*, pp. 305-06; Manucci: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 143-47.

The other features of religious life, the sacred character of the river Ganges and the cow, the pilgrimages to holy centres, charities to the Brahmans, asceticism and penences, which we study in the 18th century, figure prominently in the foreign literature on India in the preceding periods.

The accounts we have of the Muslim religion, too, show the same unity. In India, Islam gradually lost its fierce monotheism and intolerance of other religions. The growing popularity of Sufi saints and pilgrimages to their tombs, the modes of celebrating their festivals and fasts, their superstitions relating to witchcraft, astrology were so many meeting grounds between the two faiths.

The forms of arts, the instruments of music, the modes of habitations, agriculture, industries and other features of general life which we shall study in the subsequent chapters bear the marks of remote antiquity. In popular dresses, amusements, and sports, no ostensible break from the past is noticeable. To whatever phase of social life we extend our enquiry, we are impressed with its complexity and ancient character. The roots of India's social history lie in the ages of the past, and the infiltration of foreign ideas and culture hory them the required nourishment. With the advent of Islam, there were marked changes in the different phases of social life but the traditional pattern of life was not fundamentally altered. The reformist sects of the 18th century were in line with the sectarian developments of the medieval period under the impact of Islam. Culturally, the 18th century appears as a culmination of the slow intimate synthesis taking place between Hinduism and Islam in the preceding periods of history.

## *General Remarks*

Civilized life cannot flourish amid conditions of insecurity and oppression. In the 18th century, the break-up of the Mughal monarchy released forces of political disintegration and anarchical conditions which destroyed the creative and co-operative spirit of man. They caused deterioration in every phase of national life. The regions which suffered most from the ravages of the soldiery became the scenes of uprooted humanity struggling

to retain life amidst chronic conditions of famine and epidemics. The period glorified war, bred anarchy and held civilization in terror. "It may justly be questioned," says Rev. Tenant, "whether in any instance, the annals of nations can present to our contemplation, a great community plunged into an abyss of anarchy, equally deep and gloomy as that by which India was overwhelmed after the decline and fall of the Moghal Empire."[1]

The contemporary writings emphasize the acute distress caused to society by the visitations of the Maratha soldiery, "more indefatigable and destructive than the myriads of locusts".[2] The nursery songs still popular in Bengal record the frightful memories of the Maratha incursions of the times. The author of *Ryaz-us-Salatin* writes about the Maratha legions as "murderous free-booters" who drowned large numbers of innocent people in the river after cutting off their ears, noses, and hands. "Tying sacks of dirt to the mouths of others", says he, "they mangled and burnt them with indescribable tortures".[3] In North India, the invasions of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali resulted in incredible drain in treasure and goods, and the majestic seat of the Empire could not recover from their blows. The golden link of trade between India and the Middle East through caravans was smashed, and normal peaceful life which people enjoyed under the Timurid Princes in the 17th century was a legend of the past.[4] Till the invasion of Nadir Shah, says Scrafton, the Company's Resident at Murshidabad, the Mughal Government was the best administered in the world.[5] This picture was sadly reversed in the later period. In the last decade of the 18th century, Twining of Bengal Civil Service perceived that the decline and poverty of the Empire was visible even in the palaces and gardens of the Emperors. Travelling was risky, and the roads in the western parts of North India were infested with the armed bands of Mewatis, Pindaris, Jats and Gujars. All those who went out were armed with shields and

[1] Tennant: *Thoughts on the Effects of British Government on the State of Indostan*, pp. 78-9.

[2] *Asiatic Annual Register for 1799*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 131, also Elliot and Dowson, *op. cit*, *VIII*, pp. 73-4.

[3] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*: p. 344.

[4] Elliot and Dowson: *op. cit.*, *VIII*, pp. 63-4, 106-7.

[5] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 26.

scimita and the high well-to-do were accompanied by escorts.[1] According to Ghulam Hussain, the conditions had grown so bad in some regions that it was customary for people to offer sacrifices to the gods if they returned from distant places safely to their homes.[2] The wars carried on by the Maratha princes in the later period resulted in the desolation of the country-side, decline of trade and industry in the towns, and insecurity of life and property on the roadside.

South India had already suffered much in the later 17th century from the campaigns of Aurangzeb. In the next century, it was a witness to extreme suffering. Here the European wars were essentially of a ruthless character. On the defeat of the French, we learn that the English "ravaged every acre of territory between Wandiwash and Pondichery, in revenge for a similar outrage of the enemy near Madras".[3] The fertile province of Berar, victimized for many years by the European soldiery, became "the most depopulated and desolate part of India".[4] Prior to the Anglo-French embroils, the province of Carnatic held by petty feudal chiefs is described as a very prosperous and flourishing region. Scrafton says that "human nature in no part of the world afforded a fairer scene of contemplation to a philosophic mind. Everything seemed calculated to promote agriculture and manufacture."[5] In the later period, the Carnatic and the Northern Circars were the most war-beaten parts of the country. The famines following the Anglo-French wars took a huge toll of human life, and all forms, even the memory of civil government, seemed to be wholly lost."[6] Further south, the provinces of Canara and Malabar rapidly declined in prosperity owing to the wars of Hyder Ali and the Maratha chiefs, and the embroils of the Dutch with the Indian Chiefs. The Dutch Director-General at Batavia, disgusted with the state of affairs, said: "I rather wish that the ocean had swallowed up the coast of Malabar a hundred years ago."[7]

1 Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 174, 188-89, 210, 243, Also Broughton: *Letters*, pp. 13-4.

2 Tennant: *op. cit.*, p. 78.

3 Doyley & Blagdon: *The European in India*, pp. 116-17.

4 Heyne: *Tracts*, p. 327.

5 Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 12-3.

6 *British India Analysed, II*, pp. 521-22, *III*, pp. 688-89.

7 *Ibid., III*, pp. 272-73. Raynal: *History, I*, pp. 440-41.

The wars of the period caused displacement of life in the villages and towns on a large scale. The villages were depopulated, crops were destroyed and industries lay deserted. The leaders of war-like tribes were appropriating to themselves large slices of territories as feudal estates. The contemporary accounts are full of elaborate references to the spectacle of working classes uprooted from their ancestral homes, the depopulation of extensive regions and the decline of trade and industry in the towns. The avarice and extortion of governments pursuing militant policies could not provide security and encouragement for industries to prosper and agriculture to flourish. After the ravages of war, if there was even a slight dearth of rains, the fertility of land could not avert a famine which led people to migrate to other regions and create a famine there. The evil of famines bred by wars naturally became universal. The distress to the lower classes caused by scarcity of foodgrains and high prices was acute and it is recorded that to avert starvation they "ate plantain roots"[1] The Hindu poet, Sudan, who was the Court poet of Bharatpur, gives a vivid description of the effects of disturbed conditions, the scarcity of provisions and their soaring prices. The very apprehension of a military clash adversely affected the price-level and he feared that days were near when coarse grains, grass, flour, etc. would sell a seer for a rupee.[2] In the later 18th century, we observe that the ancient centres of industry wore a deserted appearance. A direct consequence of anarchy was the monstrous development of feudalism and concentration of capital in the upper classes of mercantile community. It is emphasized that the vast body of middle-class brokers, bankers, and traders were almost economically ruined in the disturbed regions.[3] The increase of crime in society, too. was alarming. Civic life was menaced by the depredations of primitive and predatory tribes. Undoubtedly the epoch was dominated by human nature in its bestial form, and social evils of *Sati*, female infanticide, slavery etc. begin to figure prominently in the foreign literature on the country. The common man passed through torture and depression. Fear complex coloured his outlook on life, evil spirits haunted his mind, and he conceived of God mostly after the image

[1] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 342. [2] *Sujan-Charitra:* p. 160.
[3] Milburn: *Oriental Commerce*, *I*, pp. 171, 329. Malcolm. *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 74.

of demons and devils. Fortunately for its people, Indian society was not completely broken, and social relationships were more or less maintained intact by the aids of its voluntary associations.

## *Cultural Decline*

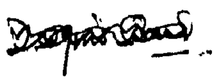
In such an age, it is evident that society could make no strides in arts and culture. The foreign accounts emphasize that India of the 18th century was culturally a pool of turbid waters. The cultural consciousness of the people was coloured by the pursuit of necromancy astrology, and alchemy. The great masses who formed a distinct cultural group did not share the enlightenment, the developed religious, social and cultural outlook of the intelligentsia, forming a very insignificant strata of society. The degradation of popular Hinduism and the low moral and intellectual level of the masses have been especially commented upon by the foreigners. Dubois observes that the Hindus had fallen very low from the eminent cultural heights of their ancestors, "that they are now far behind the peoples who inscribed their names long after them on the roll of civilized nations.[1] Alexander Dow, an equally intelligent critic of the period, says that philosophy and sciences had made substantial progress in "former ages", but that was merely a subject of past history.[2] Forster declares:

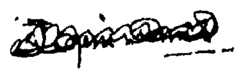
> "The human mind will naturally feel a sense of sorrow and pity for a people who have fallen from so conspicuous a height of glory and fortune, and who probably have contributed to polish and exalt the nations, who now hold them in subjection."[3]

According to Forbes, who minutely studied Indian life in Gujarat and south-western regions, the different sciences of mathematics, astronomy, and the arts of music, painting, sculptor, etc. were "at the lowest ebb in India". Their revival could only be possible "under the auspices of peace and liberty".[4] Much of what we prize in Indian culture was not people's creation, but the product of a small literary section of the upper classes working under the inspiration of the aristo-

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 380.
[2] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. xx-xxi
[3] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 51.
[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 305-07.

cracy. The higher learning was almost a monopoly of the Brahman classes and they were interested in promoting an atmosphere of cultural and spiritual ignorance in society. The social system perfecting the domination of the nobility and the priest-craft naturally resulted in the degeneration of society as a whole. The social degradation of arts which caste encouraged was also a very unhealthy feature of India's cultural life. The preoccupations of the aristocracy in the period with military matters denied society the necessary patronage to arts and learning and there was an all-round cultural decline.





*Chapter One*

# Composition of Society

FROM THE trend of cultural and political course of the people of India, it is evident that there is a unity in the apparent diversity in racial, linguistic and even political composition of the society. Geographically, culturally and socially, the Indian people differ from their neighbours, and this gives them a distinctive individuality, of which they have always been conscious. Various writers have ever emphasized the pervading unity of Indian social strands of the 18th century, and Dubois' testimony is worthy of quotation in this connection:

> "There is no place in India which does not possess certain customs and practices of its own, and it would be impossible to give descriptions of them all. Fundamentally, however, caste constitutions are the same everywhere. Furthermore, however, many the shades of difference between the various castes, however diversified the customs that control them, only slight differences exist between the forms of religious belief. Indeed, the religion of the Hindus may be said to form a common centre for the numerous elements which constitute Hinduism in its widest sense. Moreover there is a certain general uniformity of rule and practice in every-day social matters, which compels one to look upon the different masses of the population as belonging in reality to one big family."[1]

In spite of this basic unity, the people of India, as in every other community, were organized in various groups, based on difference in caste, religion and economic pursuits. By the 18th century, the regimentation of society into castes had reached such an advanced stage of development that it is difficult to formulate a scheme of classification applicable to the whole country. Castes existing in one province were not necessarily found in another. Their sub-divisions, also numerous as they were, varied according to localities. In names there was little similarity among the ramifications of caste in different parts.[2]

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.* pp. 12-3. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 16-7.

Buchanan says that Brahmans of *Smartha* sect alone in South India were arrayed into about two thousand classes.[1] It would also not be scientific to deal with caste groups under the fourfold, *Chatur-Varna*, classification. Long before the time under study, caste had lost all cognizable connection with Vedic classes and the distinctions of *Varna* were no longer operative. The various factors of tradition, custom, race, religion, migration, economic activities, etc. had contributed to the intensification of the complex structure of caste in the past, and that process of fission and the formation of new castes had not ceased in the 18th century society. Writing about the middle of the century, Robert Orme observed that though as a general estimate there were about eighty-four main castes, yet this number was not decisive "for there is a singular disposition in the Indian, from very trifling circumstances to form a sect apart from the rest of his neighbours".[2] The modern development of caste has, as rightly pointed out by Crooke, a feature of mutability and despite all its rigidity in barring the admission of strangers, it was ever "in a constant state of flux and flow".[3] Nor is it possible to classify caste groups on the basis of "social precedence" as proposed by Risley.[4] At the very outset we are confronted by the difficulty of deciding the order of rank among the various sub-divisions of any particular caste. Sub-castes which were despised at one place were esteemed at another "according as they conduct themselves with greater propriety or follow more important callings. Thus the caste to which the ruler of a country belongs, however low it may be considered elsewhere, ranks among the highest in the ruler's own dominions, and every member of it derives some reflection of dignity from its chief".[5] It is difficult to evolve any principle of social respectability for simplifying the loose and growing moiety of groups and sub-groups on the basis of caste. According to Nesfield, "function" is the foundation upon which the whole caste system of India was built up.[6] In the 18th century,

[1] Buchanan: *Southern India I*, p. 354.
[2] Orme: *Military Transactions I*, pp. 4-5.
[3] Crooke: *Tribes and Castes of the N.W.P. and Oudh I*, p. XXI.
[4] Risley: *People of India*, p. 277. [5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 23.
[6] Nesfield: *Brief View of the Caste-System of the N.W.P. and Oudh*, pp. 3-4.

caste certainly promoted specialization in economic life on hereditary lines, but in the lower castes alone it is definitely recognizable. The relationship between caste and occupation, too, cannot be held as an infallible criterion of general classification of caste-groups in society.

## *Religious Classification*

The different social groups on the basis of religion are very distinctly noticeable, and we shall deal with them as follows:

*Hindus.* The Hindus were the premier religious community throughout the 18th century even in the provinces which now form the separate homelands of the Muslims. At the opening of the century, Hamilton computed the numerical proportions between Hindus and Muslims in Bengal at 100:1,[1] and in Sind at 10:1.[2] It is difficult to rely on these estimates which he might have formed on the basis of the population of a few towns. Moreover, the foreigner could not distinguish one from the other amongst the masses. But they give us a fair idea of the overwhelming numerical superiority of the Hindus in the scale of total population. Both Ives and Stavorinus, who visited Bengal within the two decades following 1750, almost corroborate his proportion.[3] In the last decade of the 18th century, Rt. Hon. Charles Grant approximately reckoned their proportion in the Company's territories as eight to one.[4]

*Jains:* During the period, the Jains are generally mentioned as a sect of the Hindus, and they were mostly of *Vaisya* caste, successful business men, the most abstemious people of society. They were found in great numbers particularly in Gujarat and western provinces of the Peninsula down to Malabar.[5] Jainism, as an exclusive creed, was certainly confined only to the professional class of their monks, *Yatis*, severe nude ascetics with hair pulled out by the roots and mostly *Vaisyas.*[6] The laity had social and matrimonial relations with Hindus of the same caste.[7]

[1] Hamilton: *A New Account of the East Indies II*, p. 25.
[2] *Ibid, I*, p. 127.
[3] Ives: *Voyage*, p. 23; Stavorinus: *Voyages, I*, pp. 406-07.
[4] *Parliamentary Papers 1832*, General Appendix, *I*, p. 30.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 14. Forbes: *Memoirs I*, pp. 530-31.
[6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, pp. 530-31. Wilks: *Historical Sketches, V*, pp. 508-09.
[7] Martin: *Eastern India, I*, pp. 215-18.

*Muslims:* Next came the Muslims, a conspicuous social element in the life of the country. But, as Robert Orme says, numerically they were negligible, because they were "dispersed throughout the vast extent of the empire", "and if collected together would form a very populous nation". Their number was far greater in Northern India, and Delhi was their greatest stronghold.[1]

*Sikhs:* West of Delhi in the Punjab the Sikhs had grown into a dominant minority. With their beards untrimmed, the iron bracelets adorning their arms, their martial appearance, they can easily be identified. They were mostly of Jat origin, and even in the period many Hindu leaders in the Punjab were entrenching themselves as Sikh Chieftains.[2] Their's was a growing faith and their expansion in other parts was steadily in progress. In 1781, Charles Wilkins observed that at Patna they had a college for propagating their tenets. Here is a description of its main hall in the centre:

> "The floor was covered with a neat carpet, and furnished with six or seven low desks, on which stood as many of the books of their law; and the walls, above the arches, were hung with European looking glasses in gold frames, and pictures of Mussulman Princes and Hindoo Deities."[3]

Their ceremony of conversion was simple and they consented to admit anyone if he could sincerely renounce his faith.[4] At the end of the century the Sikhs had a fairly large following in Bihar and their religious activity was equally marked in the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh. In this region, their head-priest presided over about 360 subordinate *gaddis*.[5]

*Parsees:* Of the Indian people, the followers of Zoroaster formed a compact homogeneous social group. They were principally settled in the big towns like Surat, Broach, Bombay, etc. on the Western Coast. In Surat they numbered about 20,000 families.[6] They were an intelligent, industrious and enterpris-

[1] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 421.

[2] Polier: *Account of Shah Alum*: Ed: by P.C. Gupta, Appendix *II* pp. 100-01; also Francklin: *Shah Alum*, p. 77.

[3] *Asiatic Researches I*, pp. 288-89.

[4] *Ibid.* pp. 293-94.

[5] Martin: *Eastern India I*, p. 211, 214; *II*, pp. 448-49.

[6] Forbes: *op. cit. I*, pp. 78-9.

ing commercial class. In Surat they were the experts of ship-building industry and excelled all others.[1] In the latter half of the century, their exodus to the island of Bombay in large numbers was rapid and they made their mark in business life of the growing town.[2] At the beginning of the 19th century, it appeared as if Bombay was owned by the Parsee community.[3] Three things placed them in sharp contrast to the rest: their features and complexion, their worship of fire, and their disposal of the dead.[4]

*Christians:* During the period the Christian community was fast growing in numbers. It was composed of three classes: the European Residents, the mixed Christians, the Indian Christians. It is difficult to assess the strength of the pure European class. Besides the very few engaged in British capitalistic enterprise in plantations mostly after the removal of the East India Company's monopoly in 1813, they retired to the mother-country taking with them the fortunes accumulated in India. With the establishment of the East India Company's political hegemony over large regions, their number increased. About 1794, we find that the number of Europeans in the Company's army in India was about 13,500, while it rose to 24,374 by 1808-9, an increase of more than 10,000 in the military establishments alone.[5] The French, Dutch, Danes, and Portuguese owned large settlements, but no statistics are available to form an accurate idea of their numerical strength.

*Mixed Christians:* This new class was known by different names—Eurasians, Mustees, Creoles, East Indians, Anglo-Asiatics, Indo-Britons, Half-castes, etc. It was the result of racial intermixture between the East and the West and was multiplying rapidly at the settlements. Till the end of the century, the foreign woman was a coveted prize, a very scarce element of life of the settlements, and the native woman was the favourite sport of the European domestic establishments.[6] About 1784 it

[1] Grose: *Voyage I*, p. 117. Raynal: *History, II*, pp. 34-5.
[2] Raynal. *op. cit.*, pp. 449-50.
[3] Valentia: *Travels in India, II*, p. 187.
[4] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 32. Stavorinus: *Voyages, II*, pp. 3-5. Raynal: *op. cit., II*, p. 35. Forbes: *op. cit, I*, p. 79-83.
[5] Milburn: *Oriental Commerce, II*, p. 197. [6] Spear, *Nabobs*, pp. 61-2.

was estimated that 700 Eurasians were annually born in Madras and on the Coromandal Coast alone.[1] Dubois characterizes them as illegitimate offsprings of Europeans and low caste Indian women.[2] William Carey of the mission at Serampur, the Danish settlement in Bengal, condemned them and wished them to be "universally despised by people of all ranks and descriptions".[3] They were certainly an unfortunate miserable section of the population, reclaimed about the end of the century by Christian charity-schools and orphanages. Born of unsavoury, disreputable unions, neglected and abandoned, they were the perfect embodiment of all the filth and depravity of low heredity.[4]

*Indian Christians:* The missionary enterprise which commenced with the advent of the Portuguese was also being pushed up by different European missions. Conversion of Indians was, however, not a heartening and successful experiment. Progress was solely confined to an infinitesimal portion of the lowest strata, the underdogs of society. Few of the upper classes ever cared to hear the sermons of the Christian priest, even in Mysore, Travancore, and Malabar, where missions and churches of all denominations had been in existence from very early times.[5] Of Indian Christians in Bengal, Scrafton spoke as "the most abandoned profligate wretches of the human species".[6] About the end of the century, it was plain that conversion of Indians was almost a failure. Writing about 1815, Dubois states that seventy years ago, the Indian Christians numbered about 30,000 in Marawa, 100,000 in Madura, 80,000 in Carnatic, and 35,000 in Mysore, totalling about twenty-four lacs and five thousands in South India. But by the end of the century, "hardly a third of this number is to be found in these districts respectively".[7] Sensible Europeans were in favour of the withdrawal of the missions. Lord Valentia comments on the good work they did but was impressed with their failure,[8] and Lord Cornwallis was decidedly of the opinion that they were of no use.[9]

[1] Penny: *Church in Madras*, p. 507.
[2] Dubois: *Letters on the State of Christianity*, pp. 75-6.
[3] Spear: *op. cit*, p. 63. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 60. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 223. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 214, 250-51. [6] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 7
[7] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 7. [8] Valentia, *op. cit.*, p. 364.
[9] Ross: *Cornwallis Correspondence*, *I*, p. 398.

*Jews, Armenians, etc:* We also find Jews and Armenians. In Malabar, particularly at Cochin, the former were having a thriving business people claiming to have settled there from the period of the Babylonian Captivity, that is to say, from the 6th century B.C. They were endeavouring to increase their numerical strength by purchasing and manumitting slaves.[1] The Armenians figure as permanent nationals and traders prominantly at the European settlements.[2] At the time of Sirajuddaula, the Armenian merchant, Coje Petruse, took a leading part in his negotiations with the English and the French.[3]

## *Material Classification*

Indian society was preponderately feudal in character. The feudal lords constituted the dominant material group and possession of land was therefore a positive source of status in society. Land was also the principal means of subsistence to the millions of the people. In the early part of the 19th century, we note that in the second division of the Company's province of Orissa, there were only three important towns—Cuttack, Puri, and Balassore—and 11,915 villages. Out of its total population of about 1,296,365, the village inhabitants were 1,216,365.[4] In certain respects, however, society had progressed ahead of the feudal stage of development. In its economic life, the keenness of the people as merchants, bankers, artisans, and industrial workers is strikingly manifest. The commercial outlook of some classes was far more advanced in India than elsewhere, and it requires to be studied at length for a proper appreciation of the material composition of the society. In his *Philosophical and Political History of the European Settlements*, 1784, Abbe Raynal remarks:

> "When we hardly suspected that commerce was founded on any certain principles, we found that these principles were already known and practised in this part of Asia. Money was to be had there at a low price, and bills of exchange might be

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 208-09. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 433.
[2] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 171; *II*, p. 98.
[3] Hill: *Bengal in 1756-57*, *III*, pp. 364-65; also *Bengal Past and Present* July, December 1928, pp. 113-15.
[4] Adam: *Report on the State of Education in Bengal*, p. 53.

obtained for every market in India. Insurances for the most distant navigations were very common. Such was the honesty of these traders that bags of money, tickited and sealed by bankers, would circulate for years, without ever being counted or weighed. Fortunes were proportioned to the facility with which they were to be acquired by industry. Those of five or six millions (about £240,000) were not uncommon, and some were even more considerable."[1]

President Pitt of Madras, the notorious interloper of his age and grandfather of the Earl of Chatham, was struck with the superior intelligence of the Indian merchants. He said: "No people better understand their own interest, so that it was easier to effect that in one year which you (European) shan't do now in a century." He was, however, of opinion that after the examples of Europeans, they had become "very crafty and cautious".[2] Nor were their trading connections solely confined within India. They had their agencies outside, which controlled the commerce of the country of *Yaman*. The *Baniyas* of Surat and Gujarat were settled at Mocha.[3] Many families of Hindu traders of Multan were settled at Kandahar occupying "extensive range of shops", and also at the city of Astrakhan in Russian Turkistan, situated at the very centre of Asia and Europe. They were not permanent residents and came back "after accumulating a certain property".[4] So long as political power of the Company was not grounded, the springs of internal and foreign commerce remained in their hands. With the expansion of foreign trade, there had also grown up a powerful community of middlemen or brokers who made enormous profits through supply of goods to foreign companies. Pillai, the *Dubàsh* of Dupleix, writes that many of these, Chettis, Komatis, Brahmans, Gujaratis at Pondichery, "are rich enough to obtain ten or twenty thousand pagodas worth of goods on their own credit in dealing with Councillors and other Europeans".[5]

The industrial life of society was highly specialized and developed. Sir Thomas Munro's testimony to the superiority of India's arts and crafts, "good system of agriculture, unrivalled

[1] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 32.
[2] *Journal of U.P. Historical Society*, July, 1942, *XV* pp. 85-6.
[3] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 405. [4] Forster: *Journey*, *II*, p. 103, 271.
[5] Pillai: *Dairy*, *IV*, pp. 148-49.

manufacturing skill, a capacity to produce whatever can contribute to either convenience or luxury" is well known. In the scale of civilization, the Hindus, said he, were not inferior to any nation of Europe, "and if civilization is to become an article of trade between England and India, I am convinced that England will gain by the import cargo".[1] Here is another testimony from Forster, who travelled from Bengal to Europe through the Middle-East about the eighties:

> "If the degree of perfection, which manufacturers have attained, be received as a criterion to judge the progress of civilization, and if it be also admitted as a test of deciding on the antiquity of a people who adopt no foreign improvements, little hesitation would occur in bestowing the palm of precedence on Hindostan, whose fabrics of the most delicate and beautiful contexture have been long held in admiration, and hitherto stood unrivalled."[2]

We shall now examine the relative strength of its different groups, though precise appreciation is not possible for lack of statistical data for the period. We may conveniently distribute the total population as follows:

1. Nobility, 2. Religious functionaries, 3. Commercial classes, 4. Agricultural classes, 5. Industrial classes, 6. Professional classes, 7. Menial classes, slaves, autochthons, and so on.

1. *Nobility:* The nobility, composed of ruling chiefs, Rajas and Nawabs, Amirs and *Jagirdars*, was the highest privileged social class. The hierarchy of rank in this class was established and those who inherited the princely position in lineal descent from the ruling stock of earlier ages appear to have enjoyed the privilege of conferring the title of 'Raja' on others with lesser family distinctions. A small yellow mark at the bottom of the forehead is mentioned as denoting this rank.[3] The pomp and splendour of the Indian nobility in the pre-British period was well known to the outside world. It was a country where extreme poverty, elegance and crudity flourished side by side. Milton described India as "the gorgeous East with richest hand showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold".[4] The apartment of the

[1] Mill: *History of British India, I,* note p. 371.
[2] Forster: *op. cit., I,* p. 55. [3] Twining: *Travels*, p. 145 footnotes
[4] Milton: *Paradise Lost*, BK. ii, ll. 2-3.

Grand Mughal at his capital was reputed for its high tower "the roof whereof is covered with plates of gold, a sign of riches contained within it, in eight large vaults full of gold, silver, and precious stones, the value whereof is almost inestimable".[1] In the 17th century, the Mughal sovereign was reputed to be the richest and most powerful sovereign of the world, but in the 18th century, royalty declined in wealth and eminence. Ghulam Hussain speaks of the transition from Aurangzeb to Shah Alum as a change from genuine pearl to base shells in the quality of Mughal royalty.[2] In his opinion, the royalty of the later period was bereft of the grandeur, generosity, magnificence, and compassion of former times.[3] The Imperial Court, however, still set the example to the lesser satellites and princes, the lords of society. Their appearance in public was characterized by splendid processions, extravagant display of elephants richly ornamented with *howdahs* of silver, horses and whole regiments of attendants and servants.[4] When nobles of even inferior ranks moved out, they could be readily recognized by the decorations of their carriages, with bullocks whose immense horns were painted and capped with gold and with large canopies of conical shape which protected them from the blazing heat of the sun. Their palanquins were highly decked and ornamented; numerous attendants ran in front and by their sides, while they smoked their impressive hookahs with "tubes of several circles" held in hands by runners.[5] The pearls and the diamonds which adorned the garments of the nobility, the luxuries and licence which prevailed in their magnificent palaces, the clowns and bards who pandered to their vanities, have all been vividly mentioned by the foreigners. But in the territories held by the Company, they were not eminent. Here soon after the progress of the British power, princes became pensioners, and their other chiefs and relations paupers. Their spirit of enterprise and public service disappeared. The great rajas and khans, excluded from positions of trust, sank into a life of contempt and insignificance.[6]

[1] Abbe de Guyon: *History, I*, p. 262. [2] *Seir-Mutaqherin, IV*, p. 125.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 147.

[4] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 125. *Asiatic Annual Register for 1799*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 146.

[5] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 136. [6] *Ibid.*, pp. 343-44.

The landed chiefs waited for the magic wand of Cornwallis' administration which revived into the full strength the power of a feudal class once again.

2. *Religious Community:* The temples, mosques, and mausoleums of saints, of exquisite shape and design, struck the foreign eye most sharply. The saint's were numerous[1] and the functionaries of religion formed a significant group of society. The numbers of priests attached to big Hindu temples were incredibly large while those attending to ceremonies in families were equally significant.[2] They were supported on fixed grants of lands and contributions of their flock.[3] The income of many of the temples was beyond calculation. When the British took charge of Orissa, it was estimated that the income from the temples of Jagannatha, famous by devotion of centuries, from Maratha grants of land was equal to "a landed estate with a rent-roll of 1700 per annum, though the priests of the temple could easily annually raise £ 100,000 from contributions of the pilgrims of Hindu faith."[4]

The Gurus of the various Hindu sects were especially "a very select body of priests. of the highest dignity and authority in the Brahminical hierarchy; in some respects similar to bishops and archbishops in the Christian churches". They were not only venerated "but almost worshipped and on some occasions their splendid processions unite the insignia of Oriental grandeur, with the fascinating charms of the Hindu religion, bearing a great resemblance to the former magnificence of the sovereign pontiff on the great festival of the Church of Rome."[5] Buchanan writes that a hundred Pagodas a day, about £36,155, "is as little as can be directly offered to such a personage. The Raja of Tanjore is said to give his Guru 250 Pagodas a day (£ 91,18,6¼) when that personage honours him with a visit".[6]

The priests were a fundamental part of every religion, the Pirs and Mollas amongst the Muslims, the ascetic monks among

[1] Forbes: *op., cit., I*, p. 120. Craufurd: *op. cit*, pp. 94-5.
[2] Martin: *op. cit., I*, p. 483 Buchanan: *op. cit., II;* p. 287, 292; *III*, p. 33. Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 126. Stavorinus: *op. cit., III*, p. 5.
[3] *Ibid.* [4] Hunter: *Orissa, I*, pp. 115-16.
[5] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 124.
[6] Buchanan: *op. cit., I*, pp. 22-3.

the Jains and Sikhs.[1] Amongst Hindus, the members and mendicants of the numerous monastic organizations of Vishnu and Siva and Tantric cults multiplied and social charity was easily available even to the hypocrites masquerading as pious men.[2] The sacerdotal order of the lower strata of low castes was yet another distinct religious class. They prayed for those of their social circles and managed the bloody sacrifices at the shrines of their favourite deities, devils, spirits and godlings. The Dihi Brahmans, the Kanphatha Yogis, Mahapatras, Sokhas and others belonged to this fraternity in northern India.[3] People like the Bhats must also be included in this group. They were considered a religious caste and they acted as bards both in Hindu and Muslim courts. They were also the annalists of the common man's pedigree in society.[4] In Malwa, they had branched out into about 122 sub-castes and their influence over the Rajputs was so great that the Brahmans were in the background. They were their favourite genealogists. "It is to them that the proudest Rajput looks for solace in adversity", says Malcolm, "and for increased joy and exultation in prosperity".[5] In Malwa, Rajputana, and Gujarat their influence was great.[6]

Besides the professional priests, the Brahmans irrespective of their social pursuits were deemed a religious class. In the South their hold over society was very strong while their mode of life was also strict and pure. Those who instructed the youth in Sanskrit, and sacred literature and avoided the contamination of the filthy lucre were highly reverenced [7]

3. *Commercial Community:* In the 16th and 17th centuries in India, with the rapid growth of foreign trade and free use of metallic currency, the towns became the centres of thriving merchant capitalism. For home-consumption both in agriculture

[1] Martin. *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 196-98, 214-15, 484-85; *II*, pp. 492-94; *III*, pp. 173-74. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 216-22. Broughton: *Letters*, pp. 254-55.

[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 198-211; *II*, pp. 486-88; *III*, pp. 520-24.

[3] *Ibid.*, *I*, pp. 206-08; *II*, p. 487.

[4] Wilks: *Historical Sketches*, *I*, pp. 20-1, Footnotes.

[5] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 131-32.

[6] *Ibid.*, and Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 376-77.

[7] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 6-7, 10, 40-1. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 18-20.

and industry India was self-sufficient and foreign traders had to exchange Indian goods for gold. As early as the 17th century, Capt. Hawkins, whom Emperor Jehangir received cordially, observed:

"India is rich in silver, for all nations bring coin, and carry away commodities for the same; and the coin is burried in India, and goeth not out."[1]

During the period under study, the upper class of Indian merchants and bankers were the wealthiest commercial capitalists. On the coastal towns they owned vessels for trading with foreign countries. The Parsees, the Jains, the *Vaisyas*, the Marwaris of Rajputana, the Borahs, and Armenians formed a very talented enterprising business community of the country.[2] At the beginning of the 19th century, it was estimated that nine-tenths of the bankers and commercial men of India were the residents of Marwar. Their success in business was proverbial. "The tufted ones", says the proverb, "the red-faced ones (Europeans) and the Cactus plant cannot live without increasing."[3] All have spoken in praise of the superior talent, acumen and success of the *Baniyas*, and many of them, writes the Dutch Admiral (1765) in Bengal, were "extremely wealthy, and who yet spare no pains whatever they can to earn even half a rupee. These men are very shrewd in matters of trade, and are able to make very large and intricate calculations, which would take us up much time, in a moment from their heads. They write from left to right, with a split reed, and have a separate alphabet, composed of characters which are distinct from those of the Moors and Persians".[4] About the middle of the 18th century, Marathas in one of their raids under the rebel Mir Habib pinched about two crores of rupees from the House of Jagat Seths at Murshidabad—the famous bankers, but the loss was trifling and it did not affect the prosperity of the banking house.[5]

With the growth of European trade and settlements, there grew up a rich powerful community of middlemen or brokers and agents, who were loosely called *Baniyans*. The trade of Euro-

[1] Hutchinson: *The Empire of the Nabobs*, p. 51.

[2] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 34-5. Volentia: *op. cit. II*, p. 187. Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 111-12, 163. *Selections Calcutta Gazette*, *II*, pp. 271-72.

[3] Risley: *People of India*, *p.* 145.

[4] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 408-09.

[5] *Seir-Mutaqherin*. *I*, p. 393.

peans in India was conducted and often financed through them and their status at the settlements was higher in society than other places.[1] In Bengal, the Company's departments of stores, military and naval, were manned by them and in his letter of March 24, 1766, to the Court, Clive complained that "the affairs of the Company flowed through a new and unnatural channel, and your most secret concerns were publicly known in the Bazaar".[2]

The free merchants are generally praised for their high integrity in business.[3] But those who acted as brokers of European Companies and merchants could not claim that honour. Pillai, himself of that category, describes other *Dubashes* at Pondichery as men of "base character" who could "eat dirt for a cash: love of lucre is their predominant passion".[4] They did not scruple to earn riches through "speculation, embezzlements, low cunning and bribery".[5] Madame Dupleix also held no good opinion of our Diarist, who was "of the shepherd caste," and who "plunders the whole town in order to get bribes" for her husband, "and enjoys almost the whole power of the Governor". She often threatened him to be "beaten or killed".[6] The *Dubashes* in European service are condemned by Heyne as "the greatest villains that the earth ever produced," "monsters" lending money at exorbitant interest, and infecting the Company's government with vices which destroyed "order and regularity".[7]

The remarkable ascendancy of the mercantile aristocracy is a salient feature of the history of Bengal in the 18th century. The Seths of the House of Jagat Seth, called the Rothschilds of India, figure very prominently in all the revolutions of Bengal of this period.[8] Seth Manick Chand, the first illustrious head

[1] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 105-06. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 25. Innes: *Military Operations*, p. 18. Pillai: *Diary*, *I*, pp. 314-23; *IV*, pp. 148-49. At Pondichery, on the death of Kana Karya Mudali, Chief Dubash, memorial service was held in his honour at the Church. Pillai *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 324.

[2] Forrest: *Clive*, *II*, p. 308.

[3] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 105. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 32-3.

[4] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 142. [5] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 96, 158, 251; *IV*, p. 229.

[6] *Ibid.*, *IV*, p. 225. [7] Heyne: *Tracts*, pp. 121-22.

[8] Orme: *Military Transactions*, *II*, p. 30. Hill: *Bengal 1756-57*, *III*, p. 175, 186. Bolts: *Considerations on India Affairs*, pp. 157-58; Wheeler: *Early Records of Government of India*, pp. 206-07.

of the family, was a confidant of Nawab Murshid Quli Khan in all his financial enterprises.[1] Fateh Chand, his adopted son, described by Scrafton as "the greatest banker, and perhaps the richest subject in the world," steadily pushed ahead the dignity and reputation of his family.[2] He acquired the sole control of the provincial mint at Murshidabad and was created the Treasurer General of Bengal by Murshid Quli Khan. The Emperor honoured him with the distinction of Jagat Seth and a fine emerald seal bearing the title to be passed down to his posterity.[3] A very high rank was attached to the title and its holder's rank was far superior to that of any landed chief in Bengal.[4] The influence of Fateh Chand at the Court was also instrumental in the deposition of Sarfaraz Khan.[5] It was he who had secretly managed to procure the *Farman* from Delhi for Alivardi's appointment as the Nawab of Bihar independent of the *Suba* of Bengal.[6] In the times of Alivardi Khan, alike in war and peace, Mahtab Rai and Swarup Chand, his grandsons, were in the forefront of his administration.[7] These Seths had a wide hold over the mercantile as well as the landed aristocracy of the province. Their commercial agents, scattered over other parts of the country, kept them regularly informed of political events in other provinces. They maintained constant communication with the ministers of the Imperial Court,[8] who ascribed to their influence the success of the revolution of 1757 in Bengal. Monsieur Lass, the French Chief, in his brief sojourn at Delhi, talked to them on these affairs and records their reactions:

> "I felt sure that after the Revolution in Bengal, they (English) would be the only subject of conversation in the Capital. The revolution had made much noise, but it was ascribed entirely to the Seths and to Rai Durlabh Ram."[9]

[1] Hunter: *Statistical Account of Bengal, IX*, p. 254.
[2] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 36.
[3] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 274. Wilson: *Early Annals of Bengal, III*, p. 369. Hunter: *op. cit., IX*, pp. 254-55.
[4] Hunter: *op. cit.*, p. 252.
[5] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 36-7.
[6] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*: p. 322; *Seir Mutaqherin, I*, p. 355, 372.
[7] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 57; *Bengal Past and Present, XXII*, 1920, pp. 18-9.
[8] Orme: *op. cit., II*, p. 30.
[9] Hill, S.C.: *Three Frenchmen In Bengal*, p. 118.

4. *Agricultural Community:* Naturally enough the population directly supported by land was the largest group of society. In the latter half of the 18th century, the progressive decline in industry further increased the pressure on land and intensified the feudal economy of society. From the account of Dubois, it appears that about three-fourth of the total population of Peninsular India was employed as labour in agriculture or occupation dependent on agriculture and during three months of July, August and September they were idle and almost on the verge of starvation. This was the state of affairs at the close of the century.[1] Conditions were not far different in northern India. In 1809, Buchanan estimated that out of a total population of 2,735,000 in the district of Rangpur in Bengal, only 326,000 worked as artificers, while 343,000 mostly Brahmans. *Kshattriyas*, Muslims and others who had purchased their estates at auction did not work at all, constituting the landed gentry. About 2,00,66,000 or 90 per cent of the population were cultivators.[2] In the district of Purneah, more than 76 per cent of the people constituted agricultural labour or peasantry.[3] In the province of Bihar, the cultivators formed 70 to 80 per cent of the total population.[4] These estimates will certainly not hold true for the first quarter of the second half of the century when agriculture and industry in the lower classes went hand in hand and internal industrial economy was not very much adversely affected by foreign capitalistic influences. The villages were the homes of the landed community, landless labour as well as the landed peasantry and gentry. The urban areas were mostly peopled by commercial classes and government servants.[5] In northern India, the prominent agricultural castes like Jats, Gujars, Ahirs, Kurmis, etc., were the backbone of the peasantry, though they did not occupy a respectable status in society forming the broad *Sudra* group.[6] They led a hard life of honest work, innocent amusements, and possessed a remarkable simplicity in manners and sincerity of character.[7] The Muslims are

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 87 [2] Martin: *III*, Statistical Table, Appendix p 706.
[3] *Ibid.*, *III*, *op. cit.*, Statistical Table, p. 697.
[4] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 561, *II*; Appendix p. *i.* [5] Dubois. *op. cit.*. pp. 82, 91-2.
[6] Broughton: *Letters*, pp. 76-7. Coleman: *Mythology of the Hindus*, p. 284. Forster: *Journey*, p. 121 footnote.
[7] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 349. Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 254-55; *Selections Calcutta Gazette. V*, p. 337.

mentioned as engaging themselves little in agriculture; commerce and military service were their favourite pursuits.[1] The Brahmans, Rajputs, and *Vaisyas* also considered it derogatory to till the land or work in industry, so the bulk of the population degraded in the social scale provided the sinews of national production.[2]

5. *Industrial Community:* The industrial economy of society was highly decentralized on class basis and it is difficult to enumerate the different classes which constituted the broad industrial community. According to Buchanan, the following were the significant industrial classes in the province of Bihar:

i. Classes dependent on textile industry: cotton spinners, knitters, weavers, bleachers of cloth, indigo-dyers, chintzmakers, carpet makers, blanket weavers, tent makers, etc.

ii. Manufacturers of sugar, indigo, nitre, glass, etc.

iii. Carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, metal workers, potters, brick-layers, lime-burners, etc.

iv. Manufacturers of soap, wax, candle, torch, needles, wires, red-lead, lac-ornaments, glass bracelets, ink, umbrella, paper, leather bags, shoes, saddles, hookas, bidis, liquor, rose water, essences, oils, horn, ivory, palanquins, cages, arrows, etc. etc.

The people engaged in industry, on a rough estimate, formed about 10 per cent at the most of the population.[3] During the period, the industrial community dwindled and became a very poor and wretched social group.[4] By the 19th century, the establishments, once producing delicate stuffs of world fame, lay deserted and their proprietors and the weavers were dying of starvation. The loom which used to provide work to "countless widows and destitutes", and other crafts presented a melancholy picture of collapse.[5] In India of our period, there was nothing like an industrial labour of the modern factory age. The manufacturing classes were the owners of industry and held the same status which labour occupies in society in our own day. The commerc-

[1] Forbes: *op. cit., II*, p. 285. Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 421. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 88. Innes; *op. cit.*, p. 49.

[2] Colebrooke: *Internal Commerce and Husbandry of Bengal*, p. 105. Stavorinus: *op. cit., II;* pp. 482-83. Hodges: *op. cit.*, p. 34-5.

[3] Martin: *op. cit., I*, Statistical Table, Appendix, pp. 35-8.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4. Buchanan: *op. cit., I*, pp. 236-37, 242, 250, 254, 258, 311, 422.

[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 95.

ial capital of India was well developed but it did not own or manage the industry, and this was the obvious defect in the country's industrial economy based on handicrafts. Every artist and manufacturer worked on his own account, conducting "the whole process of his art, from the formation of his tools to the sale of his production".[1] He had no capital save that offered to him in advance by the merchants, "commonly half of the bargain".[2] Robert Orme describes the lot of the industrial worker thus:

> "The mechanic or artificer will work only to the measure of his necessities. He dreads to be distinguished. If he becomes too noted for having acquired a little more money than others of his craft, that will be taken from him. If conspicuous for the excellence of his skill, he is seized upon by some person in authority, and obliged to work for him night and day, on much harder terms than his usual labour acquired when at liberty."[3]

The merchants exploited the industrial community for their own gains, and when they were eliminated from the field by the foreigner, the community was all the more ruthlessly exploited and finally ejected from industry when England perfected her home manufactures.

6. *Professional Classes:* In the social group pertaining to professions we must include the various classes of teachers, medical practitioners, artists, astronomers, astrologers, government servants, soldiers, tailors, barbers and others like the jugglers, the rope-dancers, musicians, dancers, etc., catering for amusements in society. The profession of arms was in great favour with Muslims, Rajputs, Sikhs, Marathas, Polygars, and Nayars in Malabar. These classes have been described naturally as far more virile and vigorous constitutionally than others, and were bold, courageous, and dexterous in the art of warfare. They also possessed a high sense of honour and dignity. They were also not orthodox and abstemious like the other classes of the upper strata.[4] The Brahmans mostly took to literary pro-

[1] Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, p. 31.

[2] Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 52-3. [3] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 405.

[4] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 247, 343, 489. Scrafton: *op. cit*, p. 3. Francklin: *op. cit.*, p. 60, 77. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 25. Innes: *op. cit.*, p. 49. *Selections Calcutta Gazette, III*, p. 441; Long: *Selections from Unpublished Records*, p. XLVI.

fessions and others connected with divinity, astrology, astronomy and also medicine. They did not, however, practise surgery or inoculation which were left to the lower classes.[1] The Brahmans of Varanasi, in particular, were very proficient in astronomy. Their astronomical calculations are mentioned as correct and their almanacs were in use in every family.[2] In Bengal the medical practitioners, known as the *Baidos*, constituted a distinct caste who could diagnose any, disease, however latent, by just feeling the pulse.[3] In northern India, the *Kayasthas* were a highly literate and talented class successfully competing with Brahmans for the honours of government service.[4] The other professional classes like artists, painters, washermen, barbers, bookbinders, etc., were not held respectable. But their professional skill has been praised by foreigners. The Indian tailors and barbers were considered by Europeans of the day as very expert and Innes vividly dwells on the nicety of their art, their confidence and ravity, and their false promises in undertaking a work which they could not complete in time. By their pleasing art of massage and nail-cracking, the barbers could lull a man to the lap of sweet sleep.[5] The recreational group of society, too, was arranged on class basis. According to Buchanan, in Bihar, the *Mirasins* (dancing girls), *Bais* (prostitutes), *Natts* (rope-dancers, tumblers, etc.), *Daphalis* (musicians), actors, *Bhaiania*, *Yajak*, *Kathak* etc., were the different classes engaged in recreational professions. But they are mentioned as a very insignificant fraction of society. In the city of Patna and in the district of Bihar, they occupied only about 6000 houses out of 329,103 accommodating the whole population.[6]

7. *Menial classes, slaves, and autochthons:* The rest of the population constituted the depressed group of the society. In this group may be included the various menial classes, vagrants, beggars, slaves and primitive tribes. These people lived under conditions which do no honour to society. The European accounts paint them as abject and savage victims of grovelling super-

[1] Martin. *op. cit., I*, pp. 136-40. [2] Twining: *op. cit*, p. 457.

[3] Voyage of H.M.S. Hermich 1745-49; *Bengal Past and Present, 45*, 1933, p. 101. [4] Martin: *op, cit., II*, p. 736.

[5] Innes: *op. cit.*, pp. 45-6. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 53. Grose: *op. cit., I*, pp. 113-14.

[6] Martin: *op. cit., I*, Appendix, pp. 35-6.

stitions, destitute of all moral sense and given to every indulgence. They also emphasize that they were held in utter contempt in society and the social taboos did not permit them to grow in moral stature. In the province of Bihar, Buchanan writes how the various sweeper and scavenger classes, the *Doms*, *Dharkars*, *Magahis*, etc., dealing with dead skins and professions pertaining to sanitation, lived in isolated localities and were considered very vile and impure. The various primitive tribes like Musahars, Bhungihars, Rajwars. Dhanggars, Kanjjars were very much depraved and even ate the flesh of cows, horses, asses, rats, etc.[1] Dubois describes such classes as "social out-castes" who were looked upon almost as slaves by the upper strata. In South India, the *Parihas* and the *Chucklers*, the most notable depressed classes, were, however, very useful part of society as they constituted the rural proletariat. The Valluvas, "who are called the Brahmins of the Pariahs in mockery", were their priests. But they were not permitted to dabble in astronomy. The *Moochis* were also a very degraded class in the social scale and the other lower classes of *Sudras*, too, did not condescend to give them even a drop of water. On account of their handling the skins of the dead animals, they were considered a very impure class. The various nomad tribes like the Lombardis, the Wuddars, the Pakanattis, etc., are mentioned as classified with the depressed classes. The jugglers, the charlatans, conjurers, acrobats, rope dancers, etc., too, ranked with these degraded beings. All these had their peculiar customs and practices quite distinct from those of the civilized part of society and are spoken of as constituting more than a quarter of the entire population.[2]

*Population*: Owing to the lack of statistical data, it is very difficult to arrive at an accurate estimate of India's population at any time between 1750 and 1813. Whatever accounts are available, they are mostly speculative and conflicting. On the basis of the total consumption of salt, and tillage, Colebrooke calculated the population of Bengal and Bihar provinces at 24 millions in 1793, while statistics from the collectors of districts in 1789 placed it at 22 millions. The area included was roughly

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 736. [2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, Chapter V.

149,217 sq. miles.[1] In the first decade of the 19th century, the Company's subjects in the Bengal Presidency, including Assam for an area of about 60 thousand sq. miles, are mentioned at 15 crores.[2] For the period immediately after 1750, Grose writes that the Hindus were to Muslims in the proportion of 10 to 1, while the latter were at ten millions, thus giving an estimate of about 100 millions.[3] The subjects of the Mughal Empire, while it was not rent by internal disturbances, are spoken of to be about 15 crores.[4] In 1821, in his report on the territories conquered from the Peshwas, Elphinstone described 40 lacs of people inhabiting 50 thousand sq. miles.[5] In 1786, James Grant approximated the Hindu population in Northern Circars about 17 thousand sq. miles at two millions and a half, "exclusive of a few thousand Mahomedans disposed in the principal towns, and among the more regular infantry and militia".[6]

It appears certain that the population did not witness any vital increase during the period. The wars and famines took a heavy toll of life, and in Bengal we learn that between 1750-1770 about one-third of the land was rendered waste and one-third of the population perished of famine and epidemic.[7] The fertility of the soil, the universality of marriage, however, permitted society to recuperate the loss in population quite easily.[8]

[1] Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, pp. 9-14.
[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p vii.
[3] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 337.
[4] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 147.
[5] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 1
[6] Firmioger: *Fifth Report on India Affairs*, *III*, p. 9.
[7] *Sixth Report*, Committee of Secrecy 1773, p. 300.
[8] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 408.

*Chapter Two*

# Social Organization

THE MOST STRIKING feature of Indian society in the 18th century was its stratification into social classes, marked off from others, on the basis of social status determined by birth. The Hindu social organization was absolutely dominated by the institution of caste which, as Max Weber observes, signifies the enhancement and transformation of social distance into a religion, or more strictly a magical principle.[1] The institution was universal in its application and created absolute and permanent stratifications of the community. The social classes were not dynamic, and the social status of the individual was not variable while inter-class social intercourse through marriage was inconceivable.

In Indian society the Hindu was necessarily known by his caste—"a man without caste was an insulting epithet which in no case could be forgiven or forgotten".[2] Pride of caste formed an elementary ingredient of Hindu nature and Dubois says that the Hindus were much more attached to their caste "than the gentry of Europeans are to their rank".[3] What is significant is the fact that the Hindus' attachment to caste, both high and low, was formidable and Christian missionaries counted it among the chief obstacles to their conversion. Wilson makes the following interesting observation on the attachment of the Hindus to caste:

> "The multiplication of castes in India is not the enactment of any code, though it may be remotely the effect: it is the work of the people, among the most degraded of whom prevails not the shame, but the 'pride' of caste. The lowest native is no outcaste, he has an acknowledged place in society; he is the member of a class; and he is invariably more retentive of the distinction than those above him. In depicting

[1] Iver: *op. cit.*, p. 172. [2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 41.
[3] *Ibid.* See also Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 466-68; Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 237.

the horrors of the system, European writers lose sight of the compensations. The veriest Chandala, who is one of a community, is less miserable, less unhappy, than many of the paupers of the civilized communities of Europe, with whom no man owns companionship or kindred; they are the true outcastes—not the Pariah or Chandala."[1]

The institution of caste divided the entire Hindu population into three broad social groups: the privileged, the unprivileged, and the untouchables. Broadly speaking, the people of the Brahman, *Kshattriya* and *Vaisya* castes belonged to the first group and were the "twice-born". They were entitled to the ceremony performed by the Brahman priest, initiating them into the second birth. The "sacred thread" was the chief mark of distinction and an emblem of the superiority of these high-caste Hindus.[2] The members of the second group, loosely termed *Sudras*, could not perform the ceremony; they were debarred from the privileges of study and recital of Scriptures, but the Brahman priests would act as instructors and family priests of some of the upper classes.[3] The untouchables constituted the underdogs of the society. They were the *Sudras* of impure birth, performing social duties which subjected them to constant defilement. They were condemned to permanent social degradation, denied elementary civic rights, and rigidly excluded from all public places, even the neighbourhood of caste Hindus.[4]

The institution of caste profoundlyin fluenced the character of society in many ways and will be studied in detail in the following pages. We shall also examine how it permeated the Muslim social organization which, theoretically, upheld minimum of class distinctions. Dominated by the Hindu environment, and built mostly of the Hindu stock, the Muslim society could not escape the influence of caste. In the 18th century, class in Muslim society was very much patterned on caste lines.[5]

[1] Mill: *op. cit.*, *I*, footnote, p. 140.

[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 163. Coleman: *op. cit.*, p. 155. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 207.

[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 163. Also see Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 736-38. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 235.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 8-16, 66-80. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 202-03. Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 466, 738-39.

[5] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 110-11. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 144-46. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 421-22.

## *Problem of Classification and Definition*

We have stated before how difficult it is to evolve a scheme of classification of castes which can be applied to the country as a whole. Similar difficulty arises in regard to the definition of caste, and we may agree with Sir Denzil Ibbetson "that nothing can be more variable and more difficult to define than caste; and that the fact that a generation is descended from ancestors of any given caste creates a presumption and nothing more than that, generation is also of the same caste, a presumption liable to be defeated by an infinite variety of circumstances".[1] What we can do is to interpret the social implications of the institution, and the influence it exercised on the life and mind of the individual. It was not merely the basis of social stratification, a fundamental feature of division among the Hindus, but a vital, comprehensive social association implanting in man strong social prejudices, attitudes, and class consciousness. The words Brahman, *Kshattriya Vaisya*, *Sudra*, and were still current in most of the caste designations, but they had no more than a vague generic significance. The multiplicity of castes or sub-castes was a hard-striking fact of social organization and it rested on various social factors, primarily on endogamy and connubium, and secondarily on race, tribe, sect, tradition, locality, occupation, etc. We may agree with the French missionary that in many cases, "the name of a caste forms after all its best indication".[2] The other striking feature was that the different classes were barred from free intercourse with each other, "the inferior ones were necessarily excluded from intimate social contacts with the superiors".[3] .

## *Caste and Marriage*

Caste governed the code of rules and conventions relating to

[1] Ibbetson: *Castes in the Punjab, I*, pp. 1-2. In this connection he quotes the cynical reflection of the agnostic who summed up his philosophy in the well-known words, "The only thing that I know is that I know nothing, and I am not quite sure that I know that."

[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 25.

[3] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 26. Stavorinus: *op. cit., II*, p. 480. Forster: *op. cit., I*, p. 37. Dow: *op. cit. I*, p.xxxii. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 9. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 16-23.

marriage in Hindu society. In the 18th century, inter-caste matrimonial connections were beyond the comprehension of people and were liable to be visited by the sentence of excommunication. During the period we have evidence that the rules of caste, if violated in other respects, were leniently viewed but those in respect of marriage and sexual intercourse were rigorously enforced. A section of Brahmans in the West Coast under the Peshwa government was detected violating the established rule of marriage. They were marrying their daughters to the sons of their sisters; hence they were excommunicated.[1] If a girl of high caste in Peshwas' dominions were detected in act of adultery, she could be sold and treated as a slave.[2] In this sense caste implied hereditary continuation of families in the same group and prevented wide inter-mixture of blood.[3] Marriage in the same caste was a social maxim of almost universal applicability among the Hindus. Malabar alone appears to be an exception where the Brahmans accepted a girl from the Nayars, a practice sanctioned by the laws of Manu.[4] Elsewhere caste suffered from various distinctions of rank even within its own sub-groups and these, in their turn, influenced marriage. As a general rule, among castes, whose people were not privileged to be reckoned as "twice-born", the sub-castes had become entirely distinct endogamous groups. In this sense anything like a *Sudra* caste was non-existent. The various artisan and professional castes, loosely termed *Sudra*, by the end of the 18th century had organized themselves into separate endogamous units of society. Their sub-divisions had become distinct castes.[5] So strict was the rule that even sexual connection of the woman with a man outside her caste invariably entailed her excommunication from her own.[6] This rule was rigidly observed even by those castes which were considered "altogether vile".[7]

If matrimony within the group be construed as the fundamental test of caste, then the Kayasthas of Northern India, who

[1] *Selections from Raja of Satara's Diaries*, *II*, case 317.

[2] *Ibid.*, case 103. [3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 34.

[4] Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 315. Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 243-44. Also *The Laws of Manu* edited by Max Muller.

[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 163-66; *II*, pp. 451-64. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 249; *II*, pp. 24-25, 27-28, 119, 127-29, 153-55, 329, 338, 384; *III*, pp. 22, 53, 184. [6] *Ibid.* [7] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 177.

might have been one caste before, had ceased to be so by the end of the 18th century. Their various sub-divisions like those of Srivastavas, Bhatnagars, Mathurs, Saxenas, Gaurs etc., had formed themselves into separate matrimonial groups and had thus become separate castes.[1] Similarly in South India, the Panchalars, including people of the trades of goldsmiths, black smiths, carpenters, masons, although reckoned as one caste, did not admit of inter-group matrimonial relationship.[2]

The relationship between sub-caste and marriage was, however, not necessarily uniform in the upper castes. In Bengal, the Brahmans, as also the Kayasthas, constituted single castes as distinctions of sub-castes were not material in regulating marriages within the same group. Hence those of higher birth (Kulins) were coveted by all inferior to them. Here Kulinism, although it encouraged a nefarious traffic in women, prevented the formation of rigid endogamous sub-groups.[3] But this was not the case in Northern India or Central India. In Bihar, the Brahmans claiming descent from Kanauj had split into various local sub-divisions like Shukla, Anturvedi, etc., and even among them there were no inter-matrimonial relations. The other Brahman sub-castes, too, were endogamous sub-groups.[4] In Central India, also, we find that there was nothing like a uniform Brahman caste. The Brahmans had frittered into endless, strictly endogamous sub-castes.[5] The same was true of the *Vaisya* community in Northern India. It was divided into several sub-divisions which were endogamous.[6] The Rajputs were a solid exception. There sub-groups arranged on clan basis were exogamous, and marriage was regulated primarily on the basis of "purity of descent". This, too, could be overruled as a serious consideration if the girl of the lower class or family belonged to a rich influential family. Marriage outside the broad Rajput kin-group was, however, held in odium.[7] Malcolm cites the degradation of the whole clan of Pamars in the social scale in Central India as their Chief, rulers of Dhar, married his

1 *Ibid.*, p. 163. 2 Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 269.

3 Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 440. Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 155-56.

4 Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 153-56. 5 Malcolm: *op cit.*, *II*, pp. 118-24.

6 Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 493-95; *II*, pp. 113-19, 451-64.

7 Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 459, 464. Malcolm: *op. cit. II*, pp. 130-31.

daughter to a Maràtha prince with whom "the poorest of the proud Rajput Chiefs" would refrain from eating together.[1]

As such, we may say that caste was necessarily an endogamous group but among the functional castes, the sub-groups were also endogamous everywhere. In the non-functional high castes, the various sub-castes were not necessarily so everywhere, though in Northern India, among the Brahmans, *Vaisyas* and Kayasthas they had become so.[2]

## *Inter-Dining*

European writers of the period have especially noted that there was nothing like inter-dining among people of different castes. We have referred to the statement by Robert Orme, that no one accepted food dressed or touched by one of inferior castes. Of the people of Bengal, the Dutch Admiral says that if anyone took meal with another of lower caste, he was degraded to the rank of the man with whom he observed this intimacy. By this indulgence he forfeited the privilege of his caste "and the people of the higher orders will suffer every kind of want, than submit to anything derogatory to their dignity".[3] At the opening of the 19th century Buchanan comments that though caste in certain respects had been modified by the force of times, yet in matters pertaining to food it retained its strength in full.[4] It is not difficult to see that caste rigorously overruled commensality outside its fold, nor could it view with complacency the violations of its cherished usages in relation to food and drinks. People of different castes could worship the same gods, observe the same ceremonies but, alas, they could not eat together. The delights of a common table were altogether alien to the taste of the Hindus.[5] Capt. Williamson tells us that:

> "So extremely scrupulous are the natives in the preparation of their victuals, and their consumption that if any person, not of the very same caste (with the reservation of the Brahmins or priests), should touch their bodies or their clothes, or

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit. II*, pp. 130-31.

[2] See also Blunt: *Census of Uttar Pradesh*, 1911, part *I*, p. 32.

[3] Stavorinus: *op. cit., I*, p. 410. [4] Martin: *op. cit., II*, pp. 746-47.

[5] Williamson: *General E.I. Guide and Vade Mecum*, Ed. Gilchrist, pp. 95-6.

any other article within the area, or even the surface of the area itself (in which food is prepared), the whole meal together with any earthen ware, standing within the circumvellation. . . . would be thrown away as being polluted. Nay, any portion in the mouth must be ejected; nor till the party had performed an ablution could he attempt to resume his ordinary labours, or join in society with his compeers."[1]

The injunctions of caste in respect of food, severe as they were, must have affected free social intercourse among the Hindus, and produced a parochial social consciousness.[2] In the terrible famine of Bengal in 1770, we learn that many Hindus unable to resist "the cravings of appetite" ate food from "impure hands and lost caste".[3] It, however, appears that strictness in dietary was more or less confined to what should be called *kachcha* or unfried food. But we cannot generalize as the data is insufficient. In the eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh, Buchanan observed that Brahmans had no objection to eating anything "fried in ghee even by the hands of a Sudra, provided he is of pure birth". In Bengal, however, objection was taken to this practice, and even curds, etc., from people of "inferior castes" were not to be accepted.[4] Such conventions differed from locality to locality and caste to caste. We find that Rajputs, *Vaisyas*, Kayasthas, Ahirs, etc., in the North were not hostile to the use of sweetmeats and grains fried in oil and prepared in shops. But "without loss of caste" a Brahman could drink water only from the hands of those people whom he could condescend to instruct.[5]

[1] *Ibid.*

[2] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 128. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 68. Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 285. Dubois cites an interesting case: "A Brahmin woman, whom I knew, allowed herself to be persuaded by a Sudra woman, a friend of her's, to eat part of a stew which the latter had cooked, and she even went so far as to say she thought it excellent. A short time afterwards the two friends quarrelled, and at the end of a violent altercation the Sudra woman to punish her adversary, and silence her at the same time, publicly proclaimed the sin which the other in a moment of greediness had committed. Covered with shame and confusion at this unexpected revelation, which she found it impossible to refute, the poor woman fled from the place in despair, vowing, too late, that she would never allow herself to be caught again." *Ibid.*

[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 162.

[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 182.

[5] *Ibid*, *II*, pp. 472-73, 736.

The elaborate rules of purity and cleanliness—internal and external—which formed a prominent part of the social etiquette of people were also connected with caste. The idea of the "defilement" and "pollution" of an individual through taste of "forbidden food" was strong in every caste. Naturally caste rules did not permit its members the indiscriminate use of every article of food and every type of diet. "To the question of what is the difference between such and such a caste," says Wilks, the author of the *History of Mysore*, "the first answer will certainly be to indicate what they respectively can and cannot eat."[1] The castes which observed their social injunctions relating to food abstained from the forbidden articles like meat, liquors, etc., and as a result they rose higher in social precedence than those which disregarded them. For this reason, in Bengal, the social status of peasants "was higher than that of mechanics who did not so much observe the dictates of morality".[2] The same was also the case in South India.[3] In this region the caste prescribed different codes of etiquette for different groups, one for the higher and the other for the lower ones. The use of meat, intoxicants and liquors was forbidden to the Brahmans as it was not warranted by the excellence of their caste,[4] but this was not to apply to the lower castes.[5] Laxities in the Brahmanical rules of life regarding the use of liquor are noticeable, but in South India, they abstained from eating "meat" almost to a man.[6] In Orissa and Bengal the use of fish, and perhaps meat, was permissible.[7] Excluding the Brahmans and *Vaisyas*, the greater part of the population, however, was not very scrupulous and ate, as Robert Orme says, "although very sparingly both of fish and flesh, but like the Jews, not of all kinds indifferently".[8]

The relationship of caste to food has been aptly emphasized by Craufurd: "Though the other castes have greater liberty with respect to diet than the Brahmans, yet they scrupulously

[1] Wilks: *op. cit.*, Appendix *VII*, p. 505.
[2] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*. p. 480. [3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 17.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 284. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 349. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 23. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 117.
[5] Tennant: *British India*, p. 110. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 127-29, 528-29; *III*, pp. 17, 22, 53, 184, 336, [6] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 284-85.
[7] *Fifth Report on India Affairs*, 1812, Edited by Firminger, *III*, p. 9.
[8] Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 5.

refrain from what is forbidden them, and will not partake of what may have been prouded by an inferior caste, or different religion."[1] The Hindus scrupulously observed the taboos relating to food. As such, on board the ships, the British government allowed them to carry their own water and provisions. On many occasions it was noted that when provisions did not last them throughout the voyage, the Hindu sepoys for days together continued "almost expiring from thirst and want of nourishment". They would not be tempted to eat food polluted by the touch of "inferior" hand and resigned themselves ungrudgingly to voluntary starvation.[2] Such a people could certainly not play the kind host, according to modern standards, to anyone outside their caste, the least to the foreigners supposed to have no code of social morality.[3] It is not surprising if Niebuhr wrote of them as "the most tolerant nation in the world," but that "no nation was less sociable than these Hindus".[4]

## *Caste and Profession*

The institution of caste played no insignificant part in determining the vocational expression of people in society. This has led Blunt to advocate the view that castes originated from "guilds" and in course of time became endogamous.[5] According to Ibbetson, besides "the Community of blood", the "Community of profession" is a fundamental feature of the institution.[6] From the functional point of view, however, the greater part of

[1] Craufurd: *Sketches*, p. 117.

[2] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, footnote p. 118. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 12. *Voyage of H.M.S. Harwich to India*, 1745-49. *Bengal Past and Present*, *45*, 1933, pp. 100-1.

[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 129. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 68. Ives says how Hindus of high caste insisted on Europeans "lying upon their backs, while the water is poured into their mouths, lest they should defile the vessel by the touch of either their hands or lips." *Ibid.* He mentions how in a boating excursion, on account of his ignorance he happened to contaminate the flute of an Indian by touching it with his lips and blowing it. When he returned it to the owner the latter "with great gravity and unconcern immediately threw it into the river." *Ibid*, p. 30. Dubois reflects on the contempt Hindus had of Europeans for their loose, uncultivated ways of life. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 302, 307-08.

[4] *Journal of Travels to Arabia and the East*, p. 13.

[5] *Census: Uttar Pradesh 1911*, *I*, p. 325.

[6] *Punjab Castes*, pp. 2-4.

the Hindu social structure certainly lay under the penumbra of caste and ancestral traditions of calling worked as strong inhibitions in society. Social sanction to career was naturally not based on the peculiar tastes and aptitudes of the individual but on sheer accident of birth into some profession defined and delimited in most cases by the arithmetic of caste. In the normal course the son of a priest took to the altar, that of a carpenter to his parental tools, that of a blacksmith to his ancestral forge, and thus it is that the wheel of economic activity in society revolved round the axis of heredity.[1] From Bharat Chandra's *Vidya Sundar*, a narrative poem written in Bengali in the middle of the 18th century, we get an elaborate picture of the general distribution of professions under different castes in Bengal. The Brahmans are described as performing religious and literary functions. The Baidyas followed the medical profession, and the other castes mentioned, mostly bear the names of their relative professions.[2]

Function or occupation had been, undoubtedly, a primary incentive to the multiplication of caste system and in the case of low trades, it may virtually be laid down as a general rule that caste equated with profession and *vice versa*. The other castes, non-functional in their designations, were also correlated to different spheres of activity.[3] Prejudices pertaining to professions were also wedded to social distinctions of castes and few would normally accept a work which lowered the traditional repute and dignity of their caste.[4] The social statistics compiled by Buchanan about British Indian territories reveal the preponderence of functional castes in Hindu society and impress us with the vital role of caste in promoting specialization in arts and crafts to an unusual degree.[5]

What has been said above does not strictly apply to regions

[1] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 26. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 411. Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 29. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 239 Craufurd: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 117. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 9-10. *Indian Recreations, Tennant*, *I*, pp. 87-8. Macintosh: *Travels, Selections*, Calcutta Gazette, *V*, part *IV*, pp. 651-52.

[2] Das Gupta: *Aspects of Bengali Society from Old Bengali Literature*, Calcutta 1935, pp. 219-20. [3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 113-17.

[4] Doyley: *The European in India, Letter-Press to plates*, *II*, *IV*. Also Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 189.

[5] See also Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 28-9, 34. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 10. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 411.

which had not attained to a high state of economic development implying complex splitting of trades and crafts and their differences in profession did not constitute differences of caste. Thus in Assam, even by the beginning of the nineteenth century, coppersmiths, blacksmiths, weavers, cultivators of betels, makers of garlands did not form distinct castes as in Bengal. The various "trades" with which people were acquainted were practised by them irrespective of caste, and vested interests on caste lines had not yet crystallized.[1] In other regions, highly decentralized economically, the rigidity of caste regarding occupation was also loosening. The "fences" which defined the spheres of economic interests of the various castes were gradually breaking down. The Brahmans were taking to the profession of arms, the Rajputs were seen taking to business, and the chiefs of quite low castes were settling down as princes.[2] There were, however, certain recognizable limits which the people of the high castes would not generally cross. It was a popular belief that to do any work which could be left "to the lowest among the Sudras" was to put oneself on their level. Like the Jews, the high-caste-born avoided harnessing their limbs to labour in the field, holding the plough, or following the low trades.[3] But on the whole by the end of the century, there was wide reshuffle in the professional arrangements fostered by caste.[4] The over-zealous and fervid protagonists of the institution did not bear the change in good cheer. Buchanan vividly describes their sentiments as follows:

> "All proper Hindus regret that in these days no caste adheres to its proper duties, but that many persons, in order to procure a subsistence, betake themselves to professions, for which they were not originally intended."[5]

The rigour of caste was being modified by the strain of economic conditions and poverty often compelled even the Brahmans

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 529, 556, 674, 679.

[2] Forster: *op. cit.*. p. 54. Most of the Princes of the Maratha confederacy and many Hindu rulers of South India belonged to castes not included in the "twice born" group, Dubois, p. 675.

[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 54-5. Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xxxii. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 410. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 407; *II*, p. 733; *III*, p. 156.

[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 110-11, 470; *II*, 407-10.

[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 746.

to demean themselves by low callings.[1] The Dutch Admiral reports that at Surat the Brahmans were not much respected, probably as they were working in large numbers as "coolies" carrying goods "in and out of the warehouses" at the European factories.[2] The growing worldly outlook of the Brahmans, the high priestly social class, is visible in every part of the country during the 18th century. It is interesting to note that their secularization was well-nigh complete. They figure prominently in public administration under Indian governments and owing to their influence over society, they were also patronized by the foreign power.[3] In South India their eminence in public administration was not contested by any other caste,[4] while in the North, they were successfully competing with Kayasthas for employment in the revenue and commercial departments of the Company.[5] They were also crowding the ranks of the Company's sepoy battalions.[6] Wilson remarks:

> "In modern times the Brahmans, collectively, have lost all claim to the character of a priesthood. They form a nation, following all kinds of secular avocations, and where they are met with in a religious capacity, it is not as Brahmans merely, but as being the ministers of temples, or the family Gurus, or priests of the lower classes of the people, offices by no means restricted, though not unfrequently extended, to the Brahmanical caste, and agreeably to the primitive system virtually destructive of Brahmanhood."[7]

About Mithila, in Bihar, Buchanan tells us that of the entire Brahman population, only 10 per cent followed literary pursuits, about 68 per cent occupied lands either rent-free or assessed and attended to cultivation, while about 10 per cent served under the *Zemindars* or carried on business. The rest lived on priestly work or copied books for sale.[8] It is true that those

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 295.
[2] Stavorinus: *op. cit., II*, p. 484.
[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 293. Forbes: *op. cit. I*, p. 41. Malcolm: *op. cit., II*, pp. 115-16. Martin. *op. cit., I*, p. 153, 490; *III*, pp. 155-56, 158. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 112-13. Buchanan: *Southern India, I*, pp. 18-9; *II*, p. 292; *III*, p. 243. Tennant: *Indian Recreations, I*, pp. 89-90.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 293.
[5] Martin: *op. cit., II*, p. 736.
[6] *Ibid, III*, p. 158. Forster: *op. cit., I*, p. xii.
[7] Mill: *History of British India, I*, footnote. p. 133.
[8] Martin: *op. cit., III.*, p. 156.

engaged in purely worldly pursuits, *Laukikas*, were not so revered as those who dedicated their life to higher ideals of study and religion.[1] It was, however, acknowledged that subsistence on *Bhiksha* was difficult for all in that "degenerate age" and there could be no escape from material pursuits.[2] Moreover, religious activity implying supervision of worship and ceremonies in temples was not held to be a respectable vocation. On the contrary these priests were looked down upon, and other Brahmans would have no intimate social association with them.[3] Those who condescended to accept offerings on behalf of the deceased, called *Mahapatras* in the North, were very much socially degraded.[4] Equally debased were those who presided over the domestic ceremonies of people indiscreetly in every caste, although it is true that they generally did not do so.[5] The growing contempt for purely religious functions of the priest and increasing secular outlook of the Brahmans clearly demonstrate that the vested economic interests promoted by caste were fast disintegrating in the 18th century or these were not sustainable in the disintegrating social economy of the country. In the period under review, the higher castes were encroaching on the interests of the lower castes and the lower castes were also intruding upon superior professions. About Bengal, Colebrooke writes that even Brahmans were "exercising the menial profession of a Sudra" and further:

> "Every profession, with few exceptions, is open to every description of persons; and the discouragement arising from religious prejudices is not greater than what exists in Great Britain from the effects of municipal and corporation laws."[6]

## *Caste and Social Precedence*

We have seen how caste had organized society into classes

[1] *Ibid*. Also Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 21 Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 237.

[2] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 21.

[3] *Ibid*, *I*, pp. 21, 47, 333-34; *III*, p. 94. Dubois *op. cit.*, pp. 110-11. Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 733; *III*, pp. 178-79.

[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 154, 208; *II*, p. 733; *III*, pp. 171-72.

[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 295.

[6] Colebrooke: *Remarks on the Husbandry and Internal Commerce of Bengal* (The Essay completed in 1793), p. 106.

which would admit of nothing like inter-marriage and inter-dining, and how it encouraged the formation of functional or occupational groups. The other important social manifestation of caste-psychology was social gradations as superior or inferior in status, not on differences of intellect or character of the individual but on his birth. In this respect caste carried the concept of social distance to prefection. The allegory which held that the Brahmans have sprung from the head of Brahma, the *Kshattriyas*, *Vaisyas*, and *Sudras* from his arms, thighs, and feet was still widely believed and made caste a desideratum of status in Hindu society. In Malabar as late as the 18th century, the code of caste relating to social distance was in force with a severity perceivable in no other part of India. Here the order of rank among castes was as follows: Brahmans, Nayars, Tiyans (cultivators—free men), Malers (musicians, conjurers, etc.), Pulayans (bondsmen attached to soil like Paniyans above the *ghats*). The distance to be observed by the lower castes in approaching a Nambudri Brahman is mentioned as follows:

1. A Nayar may approach but must not touch him.
2. A Tiyan was to remain thirty-six steps off.
3. A Malere three or four steps further off.
4. A Pulayan ninety-six steps.

The distance towards a Nayar was to be as follows:

1. A Tiyan to remain twelve steps away.
2. A Malere three or four steps further.
3. A Pulayan ninety-six steps.

A Malere could approach but was not to touch a Tiyan. A Pulayan was not to come near even to a Malere or any other caste but a Moplah, the native Muslim of Malabar. If he wished to speak to any of the higher castes, he was to stand at the prescribed distance and cry aloud. If by mistake someone was polluted by his touch, he was to expiate by bathing, recitation of prayers, and change of the sacred thread if he was a Brahman.[1] A Nayar woman was, however, allowed matrimony with a Nambudri and property descended in the female line i.e. to the sons of sisters.[2]

Such a classification of castes on the basis of social precedence, and the ranks of different castes is not feasible for other parts

[1] *Asiatic Researches*, *V*, p. 5, footnote. [2] *Ibid*, p. 29.

of the country. The ranks of different castes varied from place to place and within the same caste the ranks of different sub-castes were controversial.[1] It cannot, however, be denied that the social hierarchy of castes in different localities was well-nigh settled and understood.[2] So far as the Brahmans are concerned, their "immeasurable superiority" "above the rest of mankind" was crystal-clear everywhere.[3] In South India and Bengal, where they constituted almost the only high castes, their eminence was neither questioned nor refuted. In these parts, they were held in high respect by all the other castes and those reputed holy were virtually adored by others. In Bengal people swore by their head and touched their feet.[4] Stavorinus writes:

> "There are several castes of Brahmans, which differ in rank and reputation. Some of them are reputed so holy, and held in such high veneration by the people that the water, in which a Brahman belonging to them has washed his feet, is esteemed sacred, and is given to the common Bengalese to drink, who think it the greatest felicity to be allowed a share of such a disgusting beverage."[5]

We learn that when Sirajuddaula returned to his capital after concluding the treaty of Calcutta in February 1757, he had still vague fears and misgivings of the intentions and designs of the English traders. Amirchand, the Punjabi merchant, touched the feet of a Brahman and assured him of their good faith.[6] In Peninsular India where the *Kshattriyas* were considered "extinct" for many centuries[7], the Brahman was a veritable human god to the lower people and in Malabar, a religious Brahman was actually an object of worship. His very sight was an inspiration[8] to them. In the north-western and central parts of India, where other high castes, notably Rajputs and *Vaisyas*, were equally

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 23-4. *British India Analysed, III*, pp. 666-67. Martin: *op. cit., II*, p. 121-22, *III*, p. 161.

[2] Orme: *op. cit., I*, p. 4.

[3] Buchanan: *op. cit., III*, pp. 467-68. Ives' *op. cit.*, p. 23. Stavorinus: *op. cit., I*, p. 410. *British India Analysed, III*, pp. 666-67. Tennant: *Indian Recreations, I*, p. 90.

[4] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit. I*, pp. 429-30.

[6] Hill: *op. cit., II*, p. 232.

[7] Buchanan: *op. cit., I*, p. 20.

[8] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 317-18. Forster: *op. cit., I*, p. 237. Guyon: *op. cit., I*, pp. 317-18.

prominent in society, the Brahmans could not derive similar gain from their birth. Malcolm informs us that the Rajputs did not extend them "much favour" and even the Brahman Ministers of Maratha government offered them no encouragement. Though their population and the number of their subcastes in Central India was very large, yet on the whole they were not the predominant community. Very few of them were also either wealthy or learned."[1]

In society, however, caste carried the distinctions of rank very far. In Bengal, we observe that the lower castes were ranged into four grades: the Satsudra, Sudra, Mahasudra, and Antaja. In the district of Dinajpur, the Baidyas, a medical caste, ranked highest among the Satsudra, the Kayasthas were the next, then were the Navasakha, the nine functional castes, of druggists, coppersmiths, blacksmiths, weavers, barbers, potters, cultivators of betel leaf, makers of garlands, and workers in shell. After them were the castes of cultivators, confectioners, and goyalas (keepers of kine). These formed the pure *Sudra* group and the Brahmans would act as their preceptors and priests. They were expected to observe high-caste social customs, viz., no concubinage, no widow remarriage, abstinence from intoxicants and indiscreet use of flesh. The Brahmans could also drink water from their hands "without loss of caste". The *Sudras* were inferior to them as they did not strictly observe the customs of the pure *Sudras*. The Mahasudras were those castes that were not altogether vile and observed certain principles of decency, while the *Antaja* were altogether contemptible and depressed and beyond the pale of society. The former group comprised the castes of money-changers, goldsmiths, carpenters, merchants dealing in grains and salt, potters, oil-makers, fishermen, boatsmen, makers of lac, ornaments, sweetmeat sellers and confectioners, distillers of liquor, etc., etc. Many of these were rich and suffered their "degradation with impatience". The latter group included the various primitive tribes and menial castes of sweepers, scavengers, tanners and shoe-makers and so on. Some of them even ate "the flesh of oxen, which is considered as the utmost degradation of which human nature is capable".[2]

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 124-25. [2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 736-40.

The infection of caste in this respect had spread to such an extent that in the very same caste and sub-caste, in the same locality, there were subtle grades of rank in existence on the basis of purity of descent or other considerations. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, at Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh we learn that the Kayasthas of the Srivastava sub-caste were divided into three kin-groups on the basis of the purity of families, and the Krishnapakshis were the lowest. Like divisions of ranks those of Pangtis prevailed in other castes and their sub-divisions and probably these were primarily responsible for making the latter endogamous units.[1] In Bengal, among the Brahmans differences in rank on professional basis were well-developed. The teachers of the Sanskrit language were respected more than the priests officiating at ceremonies. Those who officiated for Brahmans alone were respected more than those who worked for other castes of Baidyas and Kayasthas. Those who worked for the Navasakhas rated still below in public esteem. The classes of Brahmans which degraded themselves by accepting charities in commemoration of the dead were considered impure so much so that people of lower castes, too, did not condescend to accept water from their hands. Others who read the funeral service for non-Brahman castes or acted as priests to the degraded castes were likewise considered very impure. The temples founded by persons of low origin were served by priests drawn from the impure Brahman classes.[2]

## *Caste and Social Privileges*

Apart from the distinctions of rank fostered by the institution of caste, we find that the high castes expropriated to themselves certain privileges from which others were excluded. The study of the Scriptures, learning in theology, were almost a monopoly of the Brahmans. The Rajputs and *Vaisyas* could also study and recite them but not interpret them.[3] Dubois writes that the Brahmans were very jealous of their right to read the Vedic texts, the Holy scriptures, and expulsion from caste, "without the smal-

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, pp. 451-52. [2] *Ibid*, pp. 733-34.

[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 252-57. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 142. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, *p.* 138, 196; *II*, p. 747; *III*, p. 171.

lest hope of re-entering it, would be the lightest punishment for a Brahman who exposed these books to the eyes of the profane".[1] His statement is corroborated by others, and almost entirely by Alexander Dow.[2] Bolts also writes that the Sanskrit language, "most noble and ancient", was a "dead language", "understood only by the Brahmans". The Vedas were held so sacred that "no other order of their own people are permitted to read them".[3] Buchanan mentions that when he requested the Brahman scholars of South India to part with or disclose the contents of the sacred books in their possession, they sternly refused to expose the *Slokas* to "profane eyes".[4] This, however, does not imply that the Brahmans were averse to enlightening others on Hindu theology, the metaphysical part of which appeared so baffling and obscure to the foreign mind. On this point the testimony of William Henry Tone, who commanded a regiment of infantry under the Peshwas, is interesting:

> "... I cannot forbear observing that it is generally believed that the Brahmans have an insurmountable dislike to revealing the mysteries of their religion. I will not presume to say that this is not true, but can only declare that I have never discovered any such backwardness in the Brahmans whom I have had an opportunity of conversing with."[5]

There is, however, no doubt that higher religious learning was a monopoly of the Brahmans and to the Europeans it appeared very cruel in the interests of society. They construed it as a mischievous attempt of the priestly class at consolidating its influence in society. It banned higher religious learning to the lower classes, with the result that there was predominance of primitive elements in their religious rites and ceremonies and religion was not instrumental in effecting the moral catharsis of society as a whole.[6] The Brahmans as a priestly community were also entitled to other privileges, such as gifts and charities in the name of religion, and leniency in punishments. "It is an

[1] Dubois, *op. cit.*, pp. 174-75. [2] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xxii-xxiii.

[3] Bolts: *Considerations on India Affairs*, pp. 3-4.

[4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 79.

[5] *Asiatic Annual Register for the Year 1779.* Miscellaneous Tracts, pp. 121-22.

[6] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 41-42. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 142. Tennant: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 87, 112-13.

essential part of the religion of the Hindus", says James Mill, "to confer gifts upon the Brahmans. This is a precept more frequently repeated than any other in the sacred books. Gifts to the Brahmans form always an important and essential part of expiation and sacrifice".[1] The murder of a Brahman, says Dubois, was considered "the greatest of all known crimes" absolutely unpardonable. Under Indian governments, they were exempt from taxes and various other local levies, and certain punishments. The people of the low castes were often obliged to work gratuitously for them. Bad faith towards them either by society or government was devilry, which God, too, had not the authority to condone.[2] In a sense they were above the common laws of the country. Elphinstone reports that under the Poona Government, a great distinction was made on account of caste in the award of punishments. "A man of tolerable caste was seldom put to death, except for offences against the State." Even when they were guilty of treason, the Brahmans were not publicly executed but poisoned. He further points out that highway robbery was generally punished with death, "because it was generally committed by low people". The Hinducriminal laws were highly preferential to the higher castes.[3] We are further informed that the members of the high privileged castes alone were entitled to perform the *Upanayan* and the ceremony of the sacred thread. They were the "twice-born", the rest being far inferior to them in social status.[4]

## *Right-Hand and Left-Hand Castes*

The social division of the non-Brahman castes into "Right-Hand (Ballagai) and Left-Hand (Eddagai) sections" was a peculiar feature of Hindu life in South India. The provenance of this rather odd social arrangement, is lost in fables. Some scholars are of the opinion that it had its origin in the violent conversion

[1] Mill: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 131.

[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 179-80. See also Forbes, *I*, p. 256.

[3] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54. See also remarks of Mill on Brahmans considered as popular "divinities" as powerful as fire—something "transcendently divine", *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 130.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 24. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, 207. Coleman: *op. cit.*, p. 155.

of people from Buddhism to Hinduism in ancient times, that it was an anti-Brahmanic movement directed towards reclaiming the lower strata to a higher social position. Others are of the opinion that it was of recent origin, and was introduced as a part of civil policy to divide the people and weaken their power.[1] Whatever be the truth, the division was a source of considerable strife, agitation and violence in society during the period.[2] At the European settlements, Fort St. David, Pondichery, etc., disputes between the two sections frequently took place, and European authorities felt embarrassed in settling them to the satisfaction of both the parties.[3] It is interesting to study the social privileges claimed by the two sections, in which all the different castes below Brahmans were ranged. Those of the "Right-Hand" pretended that "they have the exclusive privilege of using twelve pillars in the pandal, or shed under which their marriage ceremonies are performed, and their adversaries in their processions have no right to ride on horseback, nor to carry a flag painted with the figure of Hanumanta. The left-hand side pretend that all these privileges are confined to them by the grant of Kali on the copper-plate. . . ."[4] This struggle between the two groups for such distinctions was actively going on in the territories of Mysore State and elsewhere in the eastern parts of the Peninsula. Their privileges were nowhere clearly defined and understood, and what is interesting is the fact that the very "low castes" were the most energetic partisans in the disputes pertaining to these.[5] Ives reports that in Madras, Chettis, a rich merchant caste ranking with the Leftists, were not permitted to be carried in their palanquins through the streets of the Rightists, "although many of the latter are only

[1] *The Cyclopaedia of India I*, Third Edition, p. 601.

[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 25-7. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 250; *II*, pp. 30, 250, 260, 269.

[3] Fort St. David Consultations 1740, April 23, 24, 26, August, 29-30. Also Letters from Fort St. George 1740 and Madras to Court. September 12. Love's Vestiges; *II*, pp. 142-43, 419-20. Pillai, Diary, *I*, p. 177-78. He quotes the decree of the Supreme Council of Pondichery, 31st July, exhibited at the court house on 13th August, 1741, declaring the social pretensions of the two contending groups as non-cognizable under European law.

[4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 77-8.

[5] *Ibid.*, Dubois; *op. cit.*, 25-6.

servants".[1] When in the month of May, 1748, the Right-Hand castes lodged a complaint against the conduct of the grandson of Cuddalere Kumarappa Chetti, a noted merchant of the French Company, for riding a white horse in a procession, we find Pillai explaining the position to Dupleix, the Governor of the settlement, that "only the Right-Hand castes may use a white horse, a white umbrella, white gown and white flag. The Left-Hand castes may not use them. This is the practice throughout the land".[2]

It is difficult to deny that social distinctions claimed by each group were "highly ridiculous", and caste psychology of the people certainly intensified the craze for them.[3] The French missionary observes that the attitude of the Brahmans and other castes not directly touched by the wrangles of the two parties was of splendid neutrality, and he remarks:

> "The rights and privileges for which the Hindus are ready to fight such sanguinary battles appear highly ridiculous, especially to a European. Perhaps the sole cause of the contest is the right to wear slippers, or to ride through the streets in a palanquin or on horseback during marriage festivals. Some times it is the privilege of being escorted on certain occasions by armed retainers, sometimes that of having a trumpet sounded in front of a procession, or of being accompanied by native musicians at public ceremonies. . . . Such at any rate are a few of the privileges for which Hindus are ready to cut each other's throats."[4]

Buchanan reports that as a security measure against public peace being disturbed by the violent disputes, towns were partitioned into quarters where each party performed its ceremonies and did not carry its demonstrations into the quarters of the other party.[5]

## *The Depressed Group*

The most indefensible feature of caste in the social degradation

[1] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 25.
[2] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *V*, pp. 27-8.
[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 26-7.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 250; *II*, pp. 268-69. Prof. C.S. Srinivasachari gives a good account of the disputes between the Right and Left-Hand castes in Madras in the early part of the 18th century, pp. 68-76. *Proceedings, Indian Historical Records Commission 1929, XIII.*

of a large part of the population denominated untouchables, and who in South India, during the period, numbered, according to Dubois, about a quarter of the whole population.[1] In every society, the lower classes have invariably suffered from social disabilities, but in India, caste prejudices did not permit the individual to grow out of them. In Indian society the social stigma of birth was irretrievable as Hindu law embodied in the *Dharamshastras*, apart from the caste-ridden social consciousness, was supposed to countenance it. Both caste and law conspired against the lower orders of society and kept them in social bondage in the worst form as its helpless victims had no way out of it. It serves no material purpose to mention all the different castes included in this large depressed group of society in different localities. They were, in general, the nomad "tribes" or castes engaged in professions connected with social sanitation and leather manufacture, professions considered very vile polluting a man's whole life. These people also worked as "hired labourers" or slaves in the fields.[2] The social condition of the low castes in Bengal and South India bordered on acute distress and degeneration and certainly presents a striking contrast to their counterpart in North India, Central India and in the eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh. The accounts of Malcolm for central India, or Buchanan for the eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar do not bear out that the lower castes were totally segregated or that villages had walled fortifications denying their ingress into the quarters of higher castes. The accounts for lower Bengal, Carnatic, or Malabar point to their exclusion from all intercourse with the higher castes.[3] Dubois writes that social prejudices against them were most intense and "most strongly developed in the Southern and Western districts of the Peninsula"; that in the North they were "less apparent".[4] The Puliahs in Malabar were considered no better than "beasts" and it is mentioned that if a Nayar, "who always carried arms, met one of those unhappy people on

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 51.

[2] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9. Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 25-6. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 202-03. Dubois; *op. cit.*, pp. 50-64. Tennant: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 86.

[3] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 7, 20, 37, 55-6, 313-4; *II*, pp. 410, 414-5, 482-3. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9. [4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 53.

the road, he was entitled to stab him on the spot".[1] Ives writing about them and Nayadies in Malabar also mentions: "If only the breath of one of them were accidentaly to come across a Nair, the latter would not fail undoubtedly to put him to death. To avoid this when they see a Nair coming towards them, they take care to get out of his way."[2] Forbes who was in Malabar as the Company's administrator says that in Malabar, "the ignominious distinction of castes" was carried "to the utmost extent" and he was convinced that the institution "puts a stop to the noblest exertions of real charity, blunts the finest feelings of humanity, and estranges man from man."[3] The untouchables had no social status, no social rights, consequently no social ethics. Society tutored them to believe that their fate was "irrevocable", and that all men are not made "of the same clay". They had no consciousness of their importance in society and no urge for struggle to improve their lot.[4] All European accounts of their miseries and the filth of the lives of these people, Hallacharas, Chandalahs in Bengal, Pulias, Nayadies in Malabar, shoe-makers, cobblers, chuaklers, Pariahs, Chandalahs, Muckwas, Pallers, Vallures in different parts of South India certainly[5] recall to our mind Dante's description of hell, its fierce fires and smouldering ruins. Bacon characterizes such people from whom "the whole face of Hindustan is overrun" as "the ill-favoured dogs" of society.[6]

## *Social Disabilities*

Legally, these classes had no civic status, no civic rights and may be compared to the "slaves" of Roman society, with this difference that the latter could become freed men because Roman Law did not sanction permanent and absolute disabilities. In India the low castes were the perpetual menial stock of society with freedom of movement severely curtailed, and without any claims for free citizenship. They could not claim independent property rights

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 62, also Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 410.
[2] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 26. [3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 237.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 51. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 317.
[5] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9. Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 25-6. Dubois: *op. cit*, pp. 8-16, 56-62. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 13-14, 202-03.
[6] Bacon, Thomas: *Impressions and Studies in Hindustan*, *I*, pp. 259-60.

and in Malabar they were actually held as "slaves" belonging to the feudal lord for whom they worked.[1] They could not participate even in public religious processions of other classes and in South India, even their presence and footprints could defile the localities of Brahmans.[2] Dubois says that in Indian States, a Pariah for his audacity to enter a Brahman's house "might possibly be murdered on the spot", that a revolting crime of this sort "was actually perpetrated" "without a voice being raised in expostulation".[3] Their admission into Hindu temples was altogether out of question; they were also not entitled to the use of public utilities like wells.[4] Even professional prostitutes" and slaves of other castes, however low, are mentioned, to have no truck with them.[5] They were only patronized by Europeans for domestic service as people of other castes considered it degrading to seek service in their households.[6] Relegated to social contempt and opprobrium, it is not surprising if in their mode of life they did not share the deceney and refinement of the rest of society.[7] A classification of the untouchables, which can be regarded as universal, is, however, difficult to attempt. According to Dubois, they were the lowest among the *Sudra* community—those classes which performed "low and disgusting offices, which exposed them to frequent defilement". In the social scale artisan castes "employed in mechanical and ornamental professions" and others of barbers, washermen, etc., rated above them and did not suffer from their disabilities.[8] The depressed castes, however, among themselves were not free from caste notions of superiority or inferiority. The Pallers, mostly found round about Madura, thought themselves superior to the

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, In connection with the degraded condition of the low castes, Colebrooke quotes with approval the following statement from Tantra Shastras: "Avoid the touch of the Chandala, and other abject classes. Whoever associates with them undoubtedly falls from his class; whoever bathes or drinks in wells or pools which they have caused to be made, must be purified by the five productions of kine." *Asiatic Researches*, *V*, p. 53.

[2] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 20, 55-6. [3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 52.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-16. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 202-03. Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, footnote p. 37. [5] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 413-15, 482-83.

[6] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 54-5. [7] *Ibid.*, pp. 56-61.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Pariahs, as the former did not eat beef while the latter prided themselves as being the "main support of the Right-Hand division".[1]

## *Progressive Trends*

While society was too conservative to accept anything like a repudiation of caste, still it is not difficult to read that progressive trends were at work modifying its rigour. Under the Peshwas, we have evidence that the rules of caste, if violated, were being leniently viewed in the award of punishments, provided the nature of the offence was not a violent deviation from the rules of caste relating to marriage and sex life of woman in particular.[2] As early as 1721-22 we find that one Putaji Bir Mudhoji of the Maratha army was arrested by the Mughals at Surat, kept in confinement and "polluted". On his release his caste-men agreed to admit him back to the caste. He was just purified according to the rules laid down in the *Shastras*.[3] Readmission to caste, except in very serious breaches, was being sanctioned by the councils of castes and the Peshwas after performances of certain "penances". The Raja of Satara could even override the decisions of these councils and order caste-men to dine with the accused to effect his cómplete restoration.[4] The selections from the diaries of the Maratha government cite many cases showing that the rules of caste relating to food were relaxing and the breaches were not viewed with alarm. The control of caste over the individual was, however, great, and was being enforced by caste headmen or assemblies with which we shall deal at length later. Here we shall take note of some other trends in connection with the institution to appreciate its dynamic character.

James Mill makes a very misleading observation on the lower strata of Hindu society. In his opinion, all agricultural and "productive classes" below the *Vaisyas* were "degraded below the brutes" and were considered vile and odious.[5]

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2, also Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 491.
[2] *Selections from Peshwa's Diaries: II*, case nos. 103, 317.
[3] *Ibid.*, *I*, case no. 373.
[4] *Ibid.*, *I*, case nos. 384, 396. 399, *II*, case no. 101.
[5] Mill: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 303.

Wilson corrects him by pointing out that many of them held "quite as independent and respectable a position as they do in Europe" on "all the most important occasions of social life". The rules regarding marriage and dining were not such a hardship as they were imagined by Europeans. He further significantly points out that "let a blacksmith acquire wealth, and he will have his levee well attended by Brahmans of the most respectable descent".[1] In the period under review we also study that caste as a standard of social importance, as determinant of rank was in a state of flux and was being subjected to vital modifications. The lower castes, conscious of their importance in society, were certainly not complaisant at their status. They were asserting themselves and endeavouring to elevate their rank in the hierarchy of caste. They were certainly not renouncing caste but their assertion is perceivable as working in two directions—first, pretensions to rank as high-caste by claiming high ancestry and assuming high-caste designations; and, secondly, imitation of the practices of the higher castes for securing higher social responsibilty. Some of the accounts of South India show as if there was constant scramble for superiority among the various trading, artisan and cultivating castes at certain places. In Northern Circars, the "Rachewars, Row-wars, and Velmas" were struggling for recognition as the "genuine offspring of the Chisteree or second class" while the castes of husbandsmen, cow-herds-men, weavers, and artisans endeavoured to rank along with *Vaisyas*[2] From the account of Buchanan about different castes in Mysore, it appears that the assertion of the lower castes was vigorous. The Lingayats and Pancham Banjigarus earnestly denied that they were *Sudras* and claimed higher eminence.[3] The Jotephandas, a caste of oil-makers, pretended to be of the *Vaisya* caste, a claim contested by the Bharis who were mostly merchants and by the *Kshattriyas*. The Komatigas proclaimed that they were "the only true Vaisyas" and next in rank only to the Brahmans.[4] The Chitrakarus or painters claimed still higher

[1] Mill: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 303-04, footnote.

[2] *Minute by James Grant 1786.* Fifth Report on India Affairs, Ed. by Firminger, *III*, pp. 9-10. Also *British India Analysed*, *III*, pp. 666-67.

[3] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 236.

[4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 252, 256, 258.

eminence as *Kshattriyas*.[1] The potters had begun to put on the sacred thread and claimed supernatural powers which were ridiculed by the Brahmans.[2] At some places they were even challenging the Brahman monopoly of the Sanskrit language, by repeating prayers in Sanskrit and abandoning customs like that of widow-remarriage.[3] The shoe-makers at some places, particularly those who had migrated from the North, pretended to be of the *Kshattriya* caste.[4] The Vaishnavas, who were possibly aboriginals and had leapt into prominence as worshippers of Vishnu, were endeavouring hard to establish a non-*Sudra* origin of the caste but this attempt was being foiled by the Brahmans. They had, however, succeeded in having Brahman priests as their Gurus.[5] The Ladarus who followed different pursuits of trade in horse, cultivation, etc., were assuming the title of the *Kshattriyas* of the "family of the sun" and wore the sacred thread. They were however treated as *Sudras* by others.[6] Pillai writes that Komatis on the eastern coast who followed the profession of trade claimed pure *Vaisya* descent.[7] These efforts of the lower classes do not appear to be abortive. We observe that they were gradually winning over the Brahman priests to work for them.[8] At some places, even the august status of the Brahmans was being challenged. The Panchalas or five artisan castes, Dubois writes, "refuse in some districts to acknowledge Brahmin predominance".[9]

In Northern India also, the tendency to assume high-caste names and claim high ancestry was working actively in society. This was all the more so with primitive tribes which were gradually being reclaimed by Hinduism. In the district of Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh several people of a mountain tribe called Khateri, "a spurious race", were claiming "all the dignities of the military order".[10] In the district of Bhagalpur in Bihar, the "Kshetauris" engaged in cultivation, settled for a long time, pretended "to be of the military rank". In support of their claim they stated an interesting legend of their origin. They said that Parasram succeeded in destroying the *Kshattriyas* save two persons who fled for

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 256. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 274-75. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 395.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 302-03. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 323. [6] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 422.
[7] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 119. [8] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 348-49, 350-51.
[9] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 23. [10] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 456.

protection to Viswakarma, the god of the artists and artisans. The infuriated Parasram approached the god, demanded them but he was told that they were not *Kshattriyas* but Kshetaris or farmers. Thereafter they began to hold the plough and their descendants bore the name their god gave them.[1] In the areas adjacent to Shahabad in Bihar, the Bhars, who were originally a low occupational caste, had actually assumed the designation of Pratihar Rajputs.[2] The Bhumihars, who were, in the opinion of Buchanan, "some low tribes" like Domkatars in the areas contiguous to Gorakhpur, had assumed the rank of Brahmans in Bihar. They had succeeded in securing a rank immediately below the proper Brahmans, "although they cannot receive Dana, nor perform any office of the priesthood". The Rajputs spoke of them "with great contempt" and denied them the title of Brahman "alleging that they were impure infidels" of the tribe of Domkatars.[3] In the district of Dinajpur in Bengal many persons Vyas and pretended to be Brahmans assuming that they were descendants of consequently called themselves as Vyasokta.[4] In May 1822. Major Hexley, Agent at Bhopal, reported an interesting fact about Bagris who had emigrated from Marwar into Malwa. They were notorious thieves and even ate the flesh of cow. But they pretended to be Rajputs and their families had actually assumed the names of Rajput clans such as Rathor, Pamar, Bhatti, Hara, Chauhan, etc.[5]

Similarly, we observe that many lower castes were trying to renounce the various social practices associated with them such, as widow remarriage, indiscreet use of intoxicants, concubinage, non-vegetarian diet, and "bloody religious ceremonies".[6] They were also usurping some of the high-caste distinctions such as the right to wear the sacred thread with the avowed desire to rise in the social scale.[7] The social, upsurge of the lower classes is also reflected in the religious life of the period, and of all reformist religious activity, social reforms and the removal of invidious caste distinctions were the main plank.

1 *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 121. 2 *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 468.
3 Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 453-54, 463. 4 *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 735.
5 *Selections*—Calcutta Gazette, *V*, pp. 464-65.
6 Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 27-8, 119-20, 329, 416, 528-29; *III*, pp. 53, 95. 7 *Ibid.*, *I*, pp. 274-75. *II*, p. 268. Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Although the data on the subject is very poor, it is not difficult to see that the process of the fission of the old and formation of new castes was going on in society. About the middle of the 18th century, Robert Orme noted that castes had "many infinite sub-groups" and, in his opinion, there was "a singular disposition in the Indian, from very trifling circumstances, to form a sect apart from the rest of his neighbours".[1] Professional, sectarian, and religious distinctions, as well as other social factors were instrumental in splitting the old castes into separate units whose members in course of time would not inter-dine and inter-marry. In the province of Mysore, Pancham Banjigarus were being split into separate local and linguistic sub-groups, and a separatist tendency was strongly working within the Panchalas, where each craft was forming itself into a distinct guild organization under a single chief. Likewise among the Madigarus, a low caste of leather-workers, dressing hides and engaged in cultivation, the formation of closed matrimonial groups on occupational basis is clearly visible.[2] Among Telinga Nabjigarus we find that the different sub-groups could eat together but there were no inter-matrimonial relations, and the Chitrakarus were altogether taking themselves off from their original stock by renouncing the use of liquors.[3] The Santanamis were fast splitting into different sub-castes. Those who instructed the youth in literature and music considered themselves higher in status than those who officiated as priests in the temples.[4] Such a splitting up of the old castes or multiplication of their sub-castes on the basis of the infiltration of lower strains, was also working in Northern India. In the province of Bihar, the Brahman sub-castes are seen multiplying on the basis of professional differences. Those who lost their ranks or were degraded formed a distinct endogamous group. Such were the Agradanis who presided over the funeral ceremonies, and Gangaputras "who frequent places of worship on the bank of the Ganges, but are shunned by pure persons, and live chiefly by deceiving strangers or low people, for whom they perform the ceremonies used in worshipping the holy stream".[5] The Brah-

[1] Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 4-5.
[2] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 237, 250-51.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 254-55.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 323-24.
[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 154.

mans taking to agriculture and arms were forming a separate group of Zemindar Brahmans.[1] At Patna, according to Buchanan, the Gayawal or Gayapal Brahmans were "of a more recent formation" and were divided into fourteen *Gotras*.[2] In the district of Purnesh, many "tribes" of *Sudras* claimed to be of the "Gaur nation" and were forming a large kin-group of Gaur Brahmans.[3] The same tendency was at work among other castes. In Bihar, those *Kayasthas* who did not scruple "to smoke a pipe, to drink water, or chew betel-nut at the same table with an infidel" were degraded and they formed a distinct sub-caste.[4] At Rangpur, large numbers of a low tribe dealing in flowers and garlands and working as barbers concealed their real descent and assumed the title of *Kayasthas* forming a distinct endogamous group.[5]

The growth of altogether new castes was being encouraged by two factors primarily: social degradation and the assimilation of primitive tribes into the fold of Hindu society as distinct social groups. In Purneah, Buchanan says that in the terrible famine of 1770, many Hindus, "unable to resist the cravings of appetite, ate food from impure hands, and lost caste". They and their descendants ultimately formed a separate caste, called Suryuriya. They had priests and instructors of their own, followed the Hindu customs and abstained from beef eating. Cultivation was their profession.[6] In connection with the primitive tribes, he specifically mentions the names of two tribes. The Kharwars in the district of Shahabad retained the features of the aboriginal tribes in the Vindhya mountains that could be easily distinguished from those of the Rajmahal hills. Those among them who owned landed estates, and lived a pure comfortable life, called themselves Suryabangsis, others continued to be a new low caste bearing their tribal name.[7] Similar was the case with another aboriginal tribe, Bhanggiyas, in Bihar reclaimed as a distinct caste in the social structure.[8] It is not difficult to conclude that new castes and sub-castes were multiplying in society and the process was accelerated in the later period.

We have so far dealt only with the outward social forms of

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 157. [2] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 155. [3] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 154.
[4] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 163. [5] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 528. [6] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 162.
[7] *Ibid.*, *I*, pp. 492-93. [8] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 176.

caste—its complex structure, its peculiar Pharisaism upholding an intricate system of taboos—regulating food, sexual life and general behaviour of people in society. Much requires to be noted regarding its internal government, and the jurisdiction of caste councils and chiefs. Much of the work which in our day is done by the elaborate judiciary was done by caste itself. In this respect the vitality of caste polity in ensuring social control over the individual was remarkable. It was a comprehensive, though unwritten, code of social ethics, conventions, customs, usages and traditions, and the main support of the social fabric of the country.[1] While its deep hold over society made it static and stereotyped it also acted as a proof against "pernicious innovations". Though its rigidity implanted in the Hindu mind a narrow community outlook and class consciousness, nevertheless it gave him a sense of solidarity and disciplined his life. It had a firm hold on the popular mind as it preserved their traditions, kept alive the memories of their ancestry, and often held them together unbroken in spirit in periods of social crisis.[2]

In its own interests, caste exercised close control over its members. As Dubois says: "The shame, which would reflect on a whole caste if the fault of one of its individual members went unpunished, guarantees that the caste will exercise justice, defend its own honour, and keep all its members within the bounds of duty. For it be noted, every caste has its own laws and regulations, or rather we may say, its own customs, in accordance with which the severest justice is meted out, just as it was by the patriarchs of old."[3] The control exercised by caste was also not without effect. Writing after 1820, Elphinstone points out that owing to active caste-control and public opinion, drunkeness was "almost unknown in the Mahratta country," which had "a decided superiority in morals" over the provinces held by the Company. "Public opinion, and above all the opinion of the caste," according to him, "and the dread of expulsion, are the restraints on vices. These powers are in, the Mahratta country, in the hands of the whole caste. In the Carnatic there are regular censors to each caste, called Gunna-

[1] Risley: *People of India*, p. 278, Cotton: *New India*, p. 252; Macdonald: *Awakening of India*, p. 115.

[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 28-9, 32-3, 46. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

charies, besides religious Gooroos invested with great power".[1] On the Coromandal Coast, Innes Munro writes that even the very low castes could not think of deviating from rules and restrictions of caste as they were attended with "perpetual disgrace", for a committee of his caste takes immediate cognizance of it, and if the fact be proved he is excommunicated for ever from their society and privileges".[2] In Bengal also, the different castes had their councils, and according to Verelst, "the authority of these courts enters into the concerns of common life, and is, consequently, very extensive".[3] In other British Indian territories, as late as the beginning of the 19th century we find the various castes having their councils or chiefs to adjudicate on caste-questions and punish transgressions from their rules. Among the lower castes, in the North as well as South, we find hereditary chiefs empowered with supreme caste authority.[4] Among the high castes, usually elected representatives constituted councils in Bengal and Bihar. Many of these castes had their *Ghataks* who maintained register of marriages in the caste to ensure its purity. The members of one caste could not, however, be punished by another caste authority.[5]

The state appears to have reserved to itself the right of annulling the decrees of caste-councils. The Raja of Satara was often setting aside the decrees of excommunication served on individuals by caste authority.[6] The East India Company acted on the principle that the Hindu "legally forfeited his caste", he could not be restored without the sanction of the Government as under the Muslim Government. The Parliamentary Committee of Secrecy (1773) was of the opinion that the practice was to be kept up "as a direct assertion of the subordination of the Hindoos, who are a very considerable majority of the subjects".[7] The

[1] *Report on Territories Conquered from the Peshwa*, p. 74.

[2] Innes: *Operations on the Coromandal Coast*, p. 29.

[3] Harry: *A View of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the English Government in Bengal*, 27-8, footnote.

[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 210: *II*, pp. 139, 740, 757-58. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 80-1, 237, 245, 273-74, 315, 320, 339, 347-48, 350-53; *II*, pp. 26-8 127-29, 241, 244, 268, 329; *III*, pp. 16, 22, 52, 184.

[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 756-58; *III*, pp. 565-66, 580.

[6] *Selections from Raja Satara and Peshwa's Diaries.*

[7] *Seventh Report*, pp. 326-27.

East India Company in Bengal maintained Jatimala Kachahri for hearing and deciding cases relating to caste matters. Maharaja Nabkishen, the *Dewan* of Clive, held charge of it under Verelst, and Warren Hastings appointed his own *Gomastas*—Krishto Kanto Das, a Teli by caste, and Ganga Govind Singh.[1] The sentence of excommunication, permanent exclusion from caste, was the severest penalty that the caste could pass against any of its members. In its social consequence it was more dreadful than it seems on the surface itself. Once a family was thus socially degraded, nothing could materially restore it to its "pristine position".[2] Verelst cites a case in which a Hindu, who was guilty of bribery and was detected, was compelled "to swallow a spoonful of broth". "No sooner was his pollution known, he was degraded from his caste, lost all the benefits of society, and was avoided as a leper by his tribe." Lord Clive desired the Brahmans to consider if he could be restored to caste. After consultations they discovered a similar case mentioned in their books "but although the Brahmans effected a compliance, the man was never restored to his caste". The Muslim governors, according to him, often extorted money from Hindus by holding out the threat of defilement.[3] During our period of study it was beyond the authority caste to inflict the penalty of death, the usual penalties being fines, tortures, penances, etc.[4] In no case could the individuals go scot free if their derelictions were detected.[5] Buchanan gives a list of crimes for which Brahmans of the Smarta sect in South India could be excommunicated:

1. Sexual intercourse within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity.
2. Sexual intercourse with any prohibited caste.
3. Eating forbidden food, or drinking intoxicating liquors.
4. Slaying any animal of the "cow-kind" or of the human species, i.e., murder.
5. Eating in company of persons of another caste or food dressed by inferior castes.

[1] Forrest: *Selections from State Papers*, 172-85; *II*, p. 323.
[2] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xxxiii. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 46-7. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 14. Tennant: *Indian Recreations*, *I*, p. 86. Bose: *The Hindus As They Are*, p. 167.
[3] Verelst: *View*, p. 142.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 32-7.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 32-7.

6. Eating on board a ship a food dressed there.
7. Stealing.
8. Omitting to perform the *Sradha* ceremonies.

Smaller offences were punishable in other ways: Fines, tortures of body, shaving of head, ordeals, fasts, pilgrimage, temporary separation from caste and so on.[1] In the lower castes, adultery of a woman of another caste was often punished with excommunication.[2] It is instructive to reproduce a few cases from the diaries of the Peshwa's government to have an idea of the effectiveness of caste government. In 1744-45, a Gosain bewitched a Brahman and polluted him by dining with him. The Brahman later repented and was admitted within his caste after his castemen had passed a decree in his favour.[3] In 1746-47, one Trimbakji Gurav married a women named Bhiur by *Muhurta* form of marriage, and he overcame the objections of his caste people by securing a decree in his favour from the Raja of Satara.[4] The caste council imposed a fine on Santaji Shete for not fulfilling his promise of marrying his daughter to Jija Rib and directed him to fulfil it.[5] One Narkji Ghatge agreed to give his daughter in marriage to Ranoji Shinde. It was afterwards discovered that Ranoji was affected with leprosy. Narkji was permitted to withdraw the agreement and the Raja had to pass an order that his castemen were not to obstruct him.[6] About 1754-55 the widow of one Dewji Paratakoli was imprisoned on a charge of misconduct (adultery). Her caste-men agreed to take her back and requested the government that she were not made a slave. The prayer of the caste-men was granted. Only a fine of Rs. 50 was inflicted on her.[7] A son of Babaji Gurav of Oundh in Poona province had illict intercourse with a Mahar woman. The whole family was excommunicated. The caste people later agreed to remove the ban and the government levied a tribute of Rs. 50 from Babaji.[8] It is easy to cite many cases showing the strength of the caste-policy in the 18th century. Its powers to inflict punishments on the defaulters of

[1] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 306-07.
[2] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 249; *II*, pp. 24-5, 27-8, 119, 269; *III*, pp. 22, 53, 184.
[3] *Selections Raja Satara and Peshwa's Diaries*, *I*, case no. 384.
[4] *Ibid.*, case no. 388. [5] *Ibid.*, case no. 391.
[6] *Ibid.*, case no. 394. [7] *Ibid.*, *II*, case no. 101. [8] *Ibid.*, case no. 316.

caste rules and order them to perform penances were respected by Indian governments.

The different classes of Muslim society, although not mapped out sharply as Hindu castes, were arranged in a scheme of social gradation upheld by birth. In Bengal and Bihar, we come across two main social divisions in Muslim society, (1) Ashraf or the high-born and (2) Razil, a corruption of Rizal, "worthless" or low-born, something similar to the *Dwijas* (twice-born castes) and *Sudras* of the Hindu society. The lower social group denominated Razil collectively comprised the various professional, trading, agricultural and menial classes. The Ashrafs constituted the gentry or classes which claimed high extraction and are mentioned as having "abundance of pride". They included the Sheikhs and Saiyads, Mughals, Pathans corresponding to the Brahmans and *Kshattriyas* of the Hindu society. They considered it disgraceful to do menial work and engage in lower professions, though it was not strictly possible under the British rule, the establishment of which resulted in a rapid decline of their fortunes.[1] In southern India also, the distinctions of high-born and low-born were current and the Muslims of Arabic extraction deemed themselves the noblest section of society.[2] The non-Ashraf section of the Islamic population was further arranged into four social divisions. In Bihar, these were the Bukals or traders of low-birth who generally abstained from rural labour—the Jotiyas, the classes of agriculturists and field workers, and the Panniyas or artisan classes. Below these were the low professions entailing social degradation. Buchanan gives a long list of about 38 classes excluded from social communion with the higher groups. They were the Jolahas, Patwars (tape weavers), Darji, Glass-workers (Churisaj), Daphalis, prostitutes, Bhats, Bhatiyaras, Bhanggera (sellers of intoxicants), Halwais (confectioners), barbers, mutton-butchers, potters, shoe-makers, cutters, dyers, carpet-weavers and other menial classes.[3] There is no evidence of free social intercourse through marriage and dining among the different social groups. The democratic ideals of Islam had been successfully challenged and undermined by the reactionary influences of

[1] Martin: *op., cit., I,* pp. 110-11, 144; *II,* p. 407.

[2] Buchanan: *op. cit., II,* pp. 421-22. [3] Martin: *op. cit., I,* pp. 110-11, 145-46.

caste.[1] The Islamic social consciousness was strongly affected by "caste psychology" particularly in those areas where the Hindus were the dominant group. The remarks of Buchanan about the district of Purneah in Bihar bear it out:

> "In this district, especially where the proportion of Hindus is greatest, the doctrine of caste has gained a complete practical ascendancy over the Muslims, and has occasioned a vast number of sub-divisions, the members of which do not intermarry, and often will not eat in company . . . In some places, for instance, almost every trade forms a separate caste as amongst the Hindus, while others, it is only a few low trades that are excluded. In the former places, national distinctions are also a complete bar to inter-marriage, but in others little attention is paid to this, and a person's descent in the male line is alone considered as of importance."[2]

Even among Muslims, who were mostly the descendants of foreigners, class consciousness on the basis of ancestry or places of origin was highly developed. The Sheikhs, Mughals, Pathans and Persians were distributed into many small classes on the basis of ancestry and local origin.[3] The Muslim classes that were of Hindu stock retained caste in full vigour. Writing about the Indian Muslims in Central India, Malcolm says:

> "This class of half converts from the Hindu inhabitants of the country knows little more than the name of their professed faith."[4]

Ali also informs us that in the respectable sections of Muslim society, pride of birth was inculcated and formed an important feature of education. This was particularly so among the Sheikhs and Saiyads, who, like the Brahmans, were the "Lords" of Muslim society, were "peculiar objects of respect and favour", and were entitled to gifts and charities.[5]

In the light of these accounts, it is not too difficult to see that the entire Indian social structure was dominated by the institution of caste. It was the basis of social stratification not only among the Hindus but also among the Muslims, in spite of the fact that theoretically Islam as a social system is the very oppsite of Hinduism.

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 145-46.
[2] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 145; *III*, pp. 151-52.
[3] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 150.
[4] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 110-11.
[5] Ali: *op.*, *cit.*, *I*, pp. 6-7.

*Chapter Three*

# Family, Marriage and Position of Women in Society

## *Family*

INDIAN ETHICAL ideals have ever extolled *Grahastha* as a vital avocation for life in society both for man and woman. Family has, consequently, been the chief agency of organized social being. Contemporary evidence on it is insufficient and does not permit of an exhaustive treatment of the subject. Still it is not difficult to assess its significance in the life of the individual and general social structure.

All accounts emphasize that the patriarchal type of family in its perfectly developed state was in existence except among certain primitive communities in backward regions and in the province of Malabar. The male senior was the undisputed head and guardian of the family "flock" while others were bound to show him due respect and submission.[1] After her marriage the bride adopted her husband's home and the eldest son succeeded to the headship of the family after the demise of his father. Amongst Hindus, women could not claim any share of patrimony as the law of succession did not grant them independent rights of inheritance.[2] It was the moral responsibility of the inheritor of property to maintain the women dependent on the deceased, be he his son or near kinsman.[3]

In Malabar, particularly in the Nayar community, succession on the other hand was in the maternal line and the children of the sister inherited the family property. Man lavished the "natural marks of tenderness and affection" on nephews and nieces "and scarcely even on reputed sons and daughters". The direc-

[1] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 60-1. Ali: *Mussulmans*, *I*, pp. 3-4. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 291.

[2] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 250-51. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 55.

[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 250-51.

tion of family also did not pass from father to the eldest son but from the mother to the eldest daughter. Man's personal property after his death was shared equally by the sons and daughters of all his sisters.[1] What is interesting to note in the matriarchal arrangements in Malabar is the fact that the joint system was in existence and its working was very smooth. Love, jealousy, or disgust, says Buchanan, did not disturb the peace and harmony of a Nayar family though people of the most remote degree of kinship in the female line lived together.[2] There was also no bar to a Brahman marrying a girl from the Nayars, immediately lower in rank and a separate caste. In fact, the Nayar women were proud of their connection with Nambudri Brahmans.[3]

In Indian society, family was not limited to husband, wife and children only. In a country where whole villages are made up of people claiming common ancestry, family had to be a large kin-association providing shelter even to distant dependants and relations.[4]

Foreign critics have emphasized the significance of family as the nucleus of social relationships. Like caste, it was universal. Amongst Hindus, marriage is an "indispensable duty", a religious obligation enjoined on all save those who were vowed to life-long celibacy in pursuit of religious ideals. It was a popular belief that "propagating the species in that state entitles parents to singular marks of divine favour".[5] "To a Hindu", says Dubois, "marriage is the most important and engrossing event of his life . . . An unmarried man is looked upon as having no social status and as being an almost useless member of society."[6] Heyne reports that on his journey from Cuddapa to Hyderabad in 1809 accompanied by his wife and family, he experienced "uncommon civilities" from the local population.[7] Society's disapprobation of the unmarried state

[1] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 412. Wilks: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 4.

[2] *Ibid.*, also Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 243-44.

[3] Abbe de Guyon: *History*, *I*, p. 315.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 92-3. Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 3-4. Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 164.

[5] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 56-7, also Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p, 249. Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, p, 6.

[6] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[7] Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 291.

for a woman was very intense. For the woman her role in family was construed as her chief mission in society. It shaped her lot, regulated her rights and duties and formulated her ideals and beliefs.[1] Indian society was conscious of the fact that family was essential for the fulfilment of elementary social obligations like the satisfaction of philoprogenitive desires implying the care and nurture of infants. An Indian family has been noted for tender care of parents and it is emphasized that the affection of Indian parents on children almost bordered on dotage.[2] Ali mentions the qualifications of a good nurse as understood in this country with the observation that Muslim ladies for about two years after delivery would not taste animal food and would live on diet which was conducive to the physical growth of the child.[3] We have the following testimony of Father Bouchet who wrote in 1720 to Father Balthus: "... it is most certain that there is no nation in the world where parents are more fond of their children: the tenderness of fathers and mothers in this respect is beyond imagination."[4]

The male issue were especially coveted, as the continuation of family and its traditions were maintained through them. Moreover among the Hindus, the son alone was entitled to perform the obsequies of the deceased which was, and still is, a sacred obligation. In case of the failure of male progeny, adoption was valid and occasionally practised in a Hindu family.[5] Both amongst Hindus and Muslims, it is mentioned that the birth of a son gave rise to a festival of rejoicings in the family but that of a female child caused "consternation" and "temporal gloom".[6] Pillai, the *Dubash* of Dupleix, mentions that the birth of a son to him was a matter of rejoicing to his friends as well. Charities were distributed by them to Brahmans, grants of lands were made to them by Raja Seshani, and temples and other places were illumined.[7] This does not, however, imply that daughters

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 209-10, 232-33.
[2] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 29. Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 291. Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 6. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 110. [3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 4, 6-14.
[4] Lockman: *Travels of the Jesuits*, *III*, p. 50.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, Chapter XX. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 250. Pillai: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 15; *IV*, p. 223.
[6] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 350. Broughton: *op. cit.*, p. 207.
[7] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *IV*, p. 427.

were neglected or ill-treated. Malcolm writes how the 'Soucars' in Malwa were fond of their daughters and took pride in "bringing their little daughters in company as their sons."[1]

The disposal of the dead was equally an important duty of family. Rites and ceremonies in honour of the dead were scrupulously performed, as they were considered very necessary for the welfare of the departed in the next world.[2] Among Hindus, the funeral ceremonies were very expensive, and Craufurd writes that these were usually performed at night, and women were not allowed to attend them "out of doors", according to Dubois.[3] According to Buchanan, in Northern India, mourning among the Hindus lasted from ten to thirty days and the ceremonies of *Shradh* in honour of the ancestors were regularly performed annually.[4] In all castes the dead were burnt and children interred; among Muslims they were buried in equally ceremonious manner.[5] The passing of human life amongst all was an occasion of prolonged mourning, loud lamentations, and saying of repeated prayers for the welfare of the dead. Among the Parsees, the customs were not very much different. The birth of a child was solemnized with great ceremony and the priest prepared his horoscope and gave him a name.[6] Their mode of treating the dead was, however, quite different and has been graphically described by Europeans. The dead were conveyed in the high places with great solemnity in a procession to some selected towns known as "towers of silence" and exposed to the rapacity of vultures and kites.[7] In this connection, Ives writes:

> "The principle they go upon is that a living man being compounded of all the elements, it is but reasonable after he is dead, that every particular element should receive its own again."[8]

1 Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 134-35.

2 Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 56-7; *II*, p. 188. Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 491.

3 Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 277. Dubois: *op. cit.*, p 491.

4 Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*. pp. 183-84; *II*, 473-74, 741-43; *III*. p. 164. Also Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 278-80.

5 Martin: *op. cit.*, also Ali: *op. cit.*. *I*, pp. 99-100; Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 284.

6 Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 499-500.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 509-10, footnotes. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 82-3; Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 32-3.

8 Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 32-3.

Apart from these elementary functions of care of infants and disposal of the dead, family was playing a vital role in the general life of the country. It was an insurance of relief for the aged and it has been emphasized that in an Indian family the aged members were objects of special care. Forbes says that the "hoary head" was considered by people as "a crown of glory".[1] Family in Indian society was also the most intimate and enduring social relationship. It offers no positive evidence of disharmony. Its intensity has been noted by Europeans and from their accounts it is plain that the Indian wife generally was the very ideal of conjugal devotion, of attachment to her husband and children.[2] According to Dubois, the Hindu family was an ideal family, the Hindu parents of all castes and, "above all, mothers" were not equalled "by any people on the earth in tenderness towards their progeny" and attachment to the family tie.[3] The integrity of family was a special interest of caste-dominated society and was secured in multifarious ways. Its racial purity was guarded by "prohibited degrees" of marriage and restrictions on connubium.[4] Its moral stability was ensured through a code of rules forbidding free social and sexual intimacy amongst different classes. The penalties of caste successfully prevented the formation of "illicit" family unions.[5] In a sense, life in family was a reflection of the narrowness of the social environment. Amongst Hindus, it was executing the axioms of caste and the kin-circle was a very narrow fraction of the community. In the ultimate analysis the sub-castes were mostly a union of family units which could inter-marry and inter-dine.[6] Family was also important, as Dubois points out, as a school of moral education. It set the standards of social etiquette, moulded the character of the individual and strengthened the control of the society over him.[7] It trained people in good manners and behaviour.

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I* p. 132.

[2] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 344. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 34. Forbes. *I*, pp. 8, 56; *II*, p. 110. Forster: *op. cit. I*, p. 57. Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 6. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 232-33.

[3] Dubois: *Letters on the State of Christianity*, pp. 200-03.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 21-2. Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, *V*, p. 67.

[5] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. xxx-xxxvi. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 410. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 40, 128. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 9. Ward: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 129.

[6] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 21. Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 37-8.

[7] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 340-43.

It taught courtesy, politeness towards the elders, and tenderness and affection towards the young. The son would not sit down in the presence of his father until commanded; smoking by the young before the elders was deemed disrespectful.[1] The ceremonious respect of family life in the 18th century, too, has been emphasized by contemporary authorities. In the religious life of people, family was keeping alive the rites and ceremonies pertaining to faith and passing them from one generation to another. Family life was, in fact, a continuous round of religious observances. The domestic ceremonies not directly connected with religion also make an interesting study as they give us a clear idea of the fundamental obligations of family life. They also reveal the adaptability of the Muslim community to the social environments, as the domestic rites of the Muslims were very much identical to those of the Hindus in the period under review. About Northern India, Buchanan says that ceremonies in connection with pregnancy, birth, marriage and death were an important feature of life in every Hindu household. He gives the names of the following ceremonies: *Garbha-dhan*, the first appearance of the signs of pregnancy; *Pungsa-ban*, the third month of pregnancy; *Simanta*, the eighth month of pregnancy; *Jata-karma*, one month after the birth of the child; *Annaprasana*, giving of solid food to the child; *Churakarana*, shaving of the head; *Karna-bedha*, boring the ears; *Upanayana*, investiture with the sacred thread; *Vibaha*, marriage.[2]

According to him, these ceremonies were mostly derived from the Vedas and the *Tantra Shastras*.[3] Dubois also gives a detailed account of the ceremonies observed after a woman's confinement, and those performed over infants. The *Jata-Karma* was the first ceremony performed over the child and before this period the mother in a Brahman family was considered in a state of pollution. On the twelfth day after the birth of the child, the ceremony of *Nama-Karama*, naming of the child, was performed. When the child was six months old, he was fed on "solid food" for the first time and the ceremony was called *Anna-Prasana*. There was plenty of rejoicing and feasting in the family

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 342. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 291. Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 334.
[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 206–07.
[3] *Ibid.*

at this occasion. The tonsure or *Chaula* was another ceremony performed when the child was three years in age. He was annointed from head to foot with oil, washed, decked with ornaments, and then the barber shaved his head. About this age, his ears were also pricked, and the goldsmith is mentioned as performing the operation with a very fine gold wire. Dubois justifies these ceremonies on the ground that they brought people of the same caste together and obliged them to fulfil their mutual obligations. The result obviously was a refinement in their social conduct and manners.[1]

In his account of the ceremonies of the Hindus, Colebrooke repeats those mentioned by Dubois and Buchanan. He, however, emphasizes the ceremony of investiture as the most essential and important "of all the ritual ordinances of the Hindus". In the case of Brahmans, this ceremony was not to be delayed beyond the sixteenth year, in the case of *Kshattriyas* not beyond the twenty-second, and in the case of *Vaisyas* not beyond the twenty-fourth year. This ceremony marked the second birth "and it is from this ceremony that all the three highest classes are denominated the twice-born".[2] All European writers mention that the ceremonies of marriage in Hindu society were "extremely numerous". Those relating to funerals were "still exorbitant and oppressive". The ceremonies of *Shradh* in honour of the dead were also considered very important. "Formal obsequies", says Colebrooke, "are performed no less than ninety-six times in every year".[3]

The domestic ceremonies of the Muslims resembled very much those of the Hindus The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* informs us that the rite of *Sutwas* was performed at the seventh month of a woman's pregnancy, another at the ninth after which the woman was permitted to decorate herself with jewels and ornaments. On the occasion of the child-birth, family kept up *Rutt-jugga* or nocturnal vigils; there were ceremonies and entertainments at the naming of the child and the period up to *Chuttee* was

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 155-59. According to Colebrooke, the ceremony of the first tonsure was one of the distinguishing marks of the first three classes and was a rite of great solemnity. Mill: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 362.

[2] Mill: *op. cit.*, *I*, note pp. 361-62.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 3626-7, also Dubois: *op. cit.*, Chapters VI, XX and XXIX.

passed in festivities and rejoicings according to the means of the family. The ceremonies in connection with *Moondan* or shaving of the child, placing him in the swinging condition, etc., provided further amusement. Food was distributed to the poor, goats were sacrificed and the females sat for whole nights amusing themselves with singing and other recreations.[1] The other ceremonies in connection with the infants, such as *Iuddoo-bandhana* (folding of hands), *Chuttani*, *Dantnekulna*, *Mootthee bandhana*, boring of ears are the impact of Hindu cultural influences.[2] The birthday ceremonies, the circumcision, the rites concerning the virginity of girls and puberty of boys were the other important ones.[3] At all such ceremonious occasions, guests from other families met and brought presents suited to the occasion. The ceremonies and customs of marriage among the Muslims also reveal the influence of Hindu practice. But the author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* condemns them as unlawful with the following remarks:

> "Women esteem these customs most sacred; nay, even more so than the Qoran and Huddees. It is owing to the ignorance and foolishness of these people that they have been established in Hindostan; in Arabia, Persia, and other countries, they are entirely unknown."[4]

He tells us that the Muslim princes and nobles rubbed the *Huldee* (turmeric) over the body at their marriage for about six months "during which period they have music and entertainments daily; and performing the other ceremonies every fortnight, month or so, complete the marriage in the course of a year". Among the middle-classes marriage ceremonies took about eleven days. In the lower strata, they were finished in three days.[5]

These accounts suggest that life in an Indian family was not likely to be dull and monotonous. The ceremonies were especially a source of great amusement to the females as they provided innumerable occasions of music, feasting and other rejoicings. We shall now cover up an account of the rules and customs of marriage on which the entire structure of family rested.

## *Marriage*

Marriage in Indian society was not governed by uniform social laws applicable to all. Neither were the ideals of marriage

[1] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 1-33. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 37-8. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 43-6, 51-4.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 109, footnote. [5] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 147-48.

practised by all alike. It was, however, almost a uniform social practice. Begetting sons was necessary for the continuity and perpetuation of family.[1] Society permitted man life-long celibacy in quest of religious merit but celibacy as an ideal of feminine life does not appear to be commended in the age.[2] The social ideals enjoined marriage as a necessary part of woman's life and parents were obliged to settle the matches for their daughters at the right age. A grown-up unmarried girl was a source of great embarrassment to the parents, and their failure to settle a match for her was a social odium, almost a violation of the sanctity of religion.[3] In this connection Grose remarks for the Western Peninsula:

"A father is reckoned inhuman and careless of his children's happiness, if he does not make the earliest provision for having them suitably matched; therefore they marry them at the age of three, four or five years, sometimes younger, and often run into ruinous expenses in the celebration of that ceremony."[4]

Writing about Bihar and Patna districts, Buchanan says that the father was blamed and considered a sinner if he could not arrange his daughter's marriage before she was eleven.[5]

The Hindu social ideals did not view marriage as a contract under the preceptorship of Cupid. It was a religious bond and its sanctity did not admit of a divorce. The high-class Hindu woman had to live up to the ideal of one husband in one life. Though man's right to polygamy was recognized, he could not renounce his connection with his wife. Dubois clearly states:

> "The indissolubility of the marriage tie is almost an essential principle which it seems to be is not less firmly established amongst the Hindus than that which limits this important act to the legal union of one man with one woman. A Hindu can only put away his legitimate wife for one cause, and that is adultery. If this rule is violated it is only among the most degraded of the lower castes."

He further writes:

> "I have never heard of a divorce being permitted on account

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 57.
[2] Dutta: *Bengal Subah*, p. 68, footnote.
[3] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 193-94.
[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 185; *II*, pp. 743-44.
[5] Dubois; *op. cit.*, pp. 209-10.

of incompatibility of temper, nor have I ever heard of a man being allowed to put away his wife, however vicious she might be, simply in order to marry another woman . . . ."

According to him, marriage in Hindu society could be annulled only when it was "contracted in violation of the prohibitory degrees which are laid down by custom".[1] In Muslim society, too, marriage was considerably influenced by Hindu ideals. Among the higher classes, infidelity to the nuptial engagement was a matter of social stigma. In the villages in Northern India, the practice of widowhood was carried to such an extent "that although the parties might only have been betrothed and her betrothed should die. they put widow's weeds on the girl and either send her to her father-in-law's house, or keep her in her mother's family".[2]

The principle of free selection of partners irrespective of class was not operative in Indian society, and parental control over marriage was rigidly established. Marriage was the concern of the elders in family.[3] To the Hindus, the rules of caste rendered marriage beyond the kin group almost a social sin,[4] and among Muslims also, marriage outside the class was not considered respectable. Before their marriages were settled, the family connections, pedigree, religion, and customs, etc., were ascertained and care was taken to marry into the families of the same status.[5] In our treatment of the organization of society in the previous chapter, we have tried to emphasize how caste was necessarily an endogamous group and that the sub-castes, too, in most of the cases had become compact matrimonial units of society. Besides the general caste consideration, according to Coleman, the principal points to be observed for Hindu marriage were as follows:

(a) No marriage within the "prohibited degrees".
(b) No marriage within the family of the same male stock.
(c) No marriage in the family of inferior rank, "nor even in an inferior branch of an equal family".[6]

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 214-15.
[2] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, pp. 46-7, also Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 340-42.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 55-6. Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 21.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 21.
[5] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 340-42. *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 88-128.
[6] Coleman: *Asiatic Researches*, *V*, p. 67.

In South India, these rules were based on consanguinity. The nearer the relationship, the more easily were marriages contracted, the uncle marrying his niece, the first cousin his first cousin, the widower the sister of his deceased wife, and so on. "Persons so related", says Dubois, "possess an exclusive privilege of inter-marrying upon the ground of such relationship, and, if they choose, they can prevent any other union and enforce their own preferential right, however old, unsuited, infirm, and poor they may be".[1] Several distinctions were, however, current, e.g., the uncle could marry the daughter of his sister but not the daughter of his brother, brother's children could marry sister's children, but the children of the two brothers or two sisters could not inter-marry.[2] In the accounts of Northern India, we, however, do not come across such close family alliances in marriage, and neither was the sub-caste in Northern India such a compact matrimonial group as in the South.

Contemporary European evidence emphasizes the prevalence of early marriages as the general social practice during the period. In support of this custom, Forbes quotes with approbation the remarks of Montesquieu that in hot climates, women are marriageable "at eight or nine or ten years of age; therefore . . . infancy and marriage generally go together," and that the bloom of beauty "soon decays".[3] According to Craufurd, "the mental as well as physical faculties of the human species seem to arrive sooner at maturity in Hindustan than in colder climates."[4] Robert Orme also observes:

> "Nature seems to have showered beauty on the fairer sex throughout Indostan, with a more lavish hand than in most other countries. They are all, without exception, fit to be married before thirteen, and wrinkled before thirty—flowers of too short a duration not to be delicate; and too delicate to last long."[5]

Whatever be the truth in these reflections, it appears certain that as a general rule the first marriage ceremony was performed at quite a premature age while consummation of marriage was deferred to a sufficiently advanced age till active symptoms

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 21.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 53.
[4] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 318.
[5] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 465.

of puberty could be felt.[1] On this point, Buchanan's testimony for Bihar and Bengal is quite definite. He writes:

> "In this country the marriage (*Vibaha*) is properly only a betrothing, and the wife never enters the husband's house, and does not cohabit with him until she arrives at the age of maturity, when she is conducted home with great expense and ceremony. In Bengal the wife does not indeed live with her husband regularly, until the time of maturity; but she is carried to his house immediately on marriage, and although she then returns to her parents, the marriage is always consummated so soon after 10 years of age, as the astrologer declares the time propitious."[2]

About the district of Rangpur in Bengal, he writes that women were married at a very early age but they usually had their first child when they were seventeen or eighteen years old. There were "exceedingly few" instances of children born to them before they were fifteen. In Calcutta it was certainly reported that "most women have their first child in their 15th or 16th year, two years earlier than in the country, which agrees well with the theory of Buffon, who alleges that women in cities arrive sooner at maturity than those of villages".[3]

Nothing like a minimum marriage age can be fixed as to apply to any class or province. About Bengal, Scrafton writes that girls and boys were married in infancy but consummation of marriage took place at the age of fourteen on the male side and ten or eleven years on the female side. In his opinion, the Bengal woman physically declined in vigour after eighteen and at twenty-five, she was "strongly marked with age".[4] The Dutch Admiral almost corroborates his statement and further reports that "she ceased to bear children very soon".[5] About the south-western parts of the country, Forbes says that the girls were married at three or four and boys at six or eight.[6] In the north-eastern parts of India, according to Buchanan, infant marriages under six or seven years were very popular among the lower castes but that instances of children being born to

[1] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 2. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 55-6. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 498.
[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 185.
[3] *Ibid.*, *III*, pp. 482-3.
[4] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.
[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 440-41.
[6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 55-6.

girls under sixteen or seventeen were very rare.[1] The custom of early marriages was in vogue in the South also and Dubois condemns it for prematurely developing "the latent germs of passion and vice", and "the knowledge of evil comes before the first dawnings of reason".[2] Among the Muslims, however, particularly in the cities of Northern India, the age of marriage appears to be quite advanced. Ali writes that the first marriage was usually solemnized when the youth was thirteen and the girl thirteen or fourteen at the most.[3] But early marriages were also frequent as she writes that people married their children whenever an eligible match was secured, or "when the parents on both sides have the union of their children at heart," at six or seven years of age.[4]

Though as Verelst says, "Plurality of wives is admitted throughout the East",[5] the common man in India lived as the husband of one wife.[6] Even Rev. Ward admits:

> "All the Hindus acknowledge that it is great misfortune for a man to have two wives, especially if both live in one house."[7]

Extreme sensuality and polygamy were the vices of aristocracy and *Kulinism* in Bengal. But, as Dubois says, society on the whole viewed "plurality of wives" "as an infraction of law and custom, in fact as an abuse".[8] Generally, man took to second wife only when the first wife proved barren after a long period of married life or she had borne only "female children". But even here, it was necessary to seek the consent of the first wife as "she is always regarded as the chief wife and retains all her prerogatives".[9] Among the lower classes, polygamy could neither be popular nor was profitable. With them it was mostly the bridegroom's family which bore the lion's share of marriage expenses, and even paid the dowry.[10] Moreover, fear of dissen-

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 185; *III*, pp. 90, 150.

[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p 310.

[3] Ali: *op. cit.*. *I*, p 346.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 346-47.

[5] Verelst: *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[6] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 249-50. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp 55-6. Martin; *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 185; *II*, p. 129.

[7] Ward: *op, cit.*, *I*, p. 13. footnote. Dow also writes: Polygamy is permitted but seldom practised; for they very rationally think that one wife is sufficient for one man. Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*. p. xxxv.

[8] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 210-11.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 216-17.

sions in the family supported on low income was a great check on the abuse of polygamy.[1]

In Bengal the reign of *Kulinism* was responsible for the abuse of disproportionate marriages and polygamy being carried to extreme length. Contemporary Bengali literature throws vivid light on this dark side of Indian marriage system, of a tender, beautiful girl being married to a deaf uninspiring wretch, of girls losing their complexion by constant broodings over their melancholy fate. Partners with tremendous disparity in age are painted as yoked together under marriage.[2] Among the Brahmans, the Mukhopadhyas, Chattopadhyayas, and Vandyopadhyas and among the Kayasthas, the Ghosh, Basu, Guha and Mitra occupied chief positions in the scale of *Kulinism*.[3] The craze for hunting *Kulin* matches in marriage by parents of castes lower in purity was great as marriage was being used as a means of improvement in family status, and daughters were being used as sacrificial objects at the altar of caste. Many rich families of low birth also often ruined themselves financially in procuring women from higher rank for their children. It is mentioned that a man of higher rank was often hired, "when toothless or even moribund, to marry a low child who is afterwards left a widow, incapable of marriage, for the sake of raising her father's family, and rendering her brothers more easily marriageable".[4] Buchanan points out how a *Kulin* Brahman was marriageable at every age and some Rarhi Brahmans could boast of as many as sixty wives, and that eight or ten was a moderate estimate. They were also free from the incumbrance of maintaining them. They had just to visit them at their fathers-in-law's places.[5] About the year 1805, we learn that the Raja of Darbhanga prohibited people of his estate from taking more than five wives and that there as a common practice, the Brahmans married "more wives than one".[6]

In remote hilly regions for certain classes, the accounts mention polyandry also as being in vogue. Col. Wilks mentions that among Polygars of Totier caste in South India, one wife was

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 211.
[2] See extracts from Bengali Literature, Datta: *op. cit.*, pp. 70-4, footnote.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 71-2.
[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 165.
[5] *Ibid.*, *II*, pp. 730-31.
[6] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 165.

shared by a family of several brothers, that at the time of the marriage of the eldest son, the lady was explicitly questioned on her willingness to be "the spouse" of others.[1] In Malabar the Nayar woman enjoyed the freedom to choose her husband, and Buchanan informs us that in the lower castes, polyandry was not uncommon. He makes the following comments on Tiyans, a low caste in that province:

> "In wealthy families, each man takes a wife; but this being considered expensive, in poor families the brothers marry one wife in common, and sleep with her by turns. If either of the brothers becomes discontented, he may marry another woman."[2]

In the mountainous regions of the Himalayas, reference is made to the practice of plural of husbands. According to Wilson, such a system, however odious, was a self-imposed check upon population, originating in "cold and unproductive countries" where food for a family could be procured with difficulty.[3] Bacon also refers to the practice of polyandry in the hilly regions beyond Mussoorie.[4] To society, on the whole, such marriages were a curiosity, and, moreover, the proportion of the two sexes appears to be balanced in the population.[5]

With the exception of the Parsees whose marriage was a simple ceremony,[6] marriage customs in other groups were expensive and elaborate with feasting and amusements extending for many days.[7] About the *Vaisyas* at Surat, Raynal reports that they were a very thrifty people but on occasions of marriage settlements of their children, "no expense was spared for the entertainment, the music, the dancing, and the fireworks". He writes:

> "Their whole ambition was to tell how much the wedding had cost. Sometimes it amounted to a hundred thousand crowns."[8]

About the Company's northern territories, Buchanan states that marriage was "a most intolerable burden", and that the

[1] Wilks: *op cit.*, *I*, p. 470; *III*, p. 4.
[2] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 412, 416.
[3] Mill: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 320, footnote. [4] Bacon: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 89-90.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 212-13. [6] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 498-99.
[7] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 251-52. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 309-12.
[8] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 34.

expenses of marrying daughters were far "more severe" than those of boys. On account of the dowry system, he says that in high castes, many families could not marry their girls "until after the age of puberty".[1] At many places, he writes that the marriage ceremonies financially ruined families and involved them in debts "from which death alone can relieve them".[2] In some of the Rajput castes, we shall see later that the expenses of marriage besides other considerations were responsible for the vicious practice of female infanticide. On the whole the ceremonies of marriage in Indian society were not only tedious but expensive. In support of this, Dubois cites a Sanskrit verse, which in English reads as follows: "The girl counts beauty; the mother riches; the father knowledge; relations good lineage; other people sumptuous marriage feasts."[3] In Muslim society also, marriage was a very elaborate and ceremonious process, entailing huge expenditure in the upper strata. Both Ali and the author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* emphasize how preliminary conditions of engagement took a lot of time. The family connections were properly ascertained, seers, astrologers, and *Mullas* were consulted about the future of the couple. Then followed the betrothal ceremonies which invariably included exchange of presents as well as feasting. The betrothal ceremonies virtually imposed a moral obligation on parents to abide by the contract. Prior to the solemnization of marriage, were the tedious ceremonies of *Huldee* and *Maynhdee*, and others intercepted by rejoicings of music and dinners. At the time of marriage at the bride's place, the bridegroom's party was sumptuously entertained for days together and the couple remained busy in performing ceremonies both day and night. Marriage over, the entire show closed with an exhibition of *Jayhez* given to the bridegroom by the bride's father. These ceremonies were quite costly but the father was expected to honour the bridegroom's family with rich presents and earn a name in his social circle.[4]

The arrangements of marriage were, however, different for different classes. Dubois mentions four ways: the most honourable was the one in which the father of the bride bore the entire

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 184.
[2] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 688.
[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 218-32.
[4] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 346-52. *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 84-145.

expenses; the second in which both the parties shared the expenses; the third, among the poor low castes in which the parents of the bridegroom bore all the expenses of the ceremony and even made some payment to the father of the girl as laid down by caste. This custom was a source of considerable dispute among the two parties. The fourth was the one to which the poorest section of the society was used and it implied virtual sale of daughters.[1] With the lower castes, the fourth method was quite popular, and Dubois goes to the extent of making the following assertion:

> "To marry, or to buy a wife, are synonymous terms in this country. Almost every parent makes his daughter an article of traffic".[2]

In the lower strata, remarriage of widows too was not a taboo. On the contrary the European accounts suggest that in the lower castes, women enjoyed considerable liberty of even nullifying their first engagement and marrying others in the same caste. Colonel Wilks says that in southern Malabar, the lady could disapprove of the choice of her parents and was free to select her partner "by accepting a cloth (a dress) from the man of her own selection". She had just to declare in the presence of four witnesses that she discarded her former husband and accepted "the donor of the cloth". This, says he, she could repeat "as often as the donor of a new cloth can be found".[3] About low-caste marriages in South India, Buchanan states that women were marriageable even after the age of puberty and could be divorced on a charge of adultery. But these "adulteresses", unless they had "gone astray" with men of different castes, were permitted to marry another man and were not treated as outcastes. Such marriages and the marriages of widows were called "a kind of left-hand marriages", *Cutigas* or concubinage.[4] Among the artisans and cultivators, the *Cutiga* marriage was quite common.[5] Dubois, however, states that in higher castes and many respectable *Sudra* castes such connections and widow remarriage were held disreputable and were not allowed to take place openly and with the sanction of the caste".[6] In Northern India also, we observe like differences in customs between the upper and

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[2] Wilks: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 7.
[3] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 120.
[4] Mill: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 317, footnote.
[5] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 396-97, 419.
[6] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 24.

the lower strata. About the district of Bihar, Buchanan writes that in the lower castes, the widow was generally married to her deceased husband's younger brother. If he was married, she was permitted to "marry anybody unmarried of her caste, and a married man with the consent of his wife". Such marriages were called *Segais* but children born of them were not degraded in status.[1] About Bengal, he tells us that in the low castes, divorces from "virgin spouse" were permitted and that if the fickle women confined their amours within their own caste they could be easily married. The marriage with such women was, however, not considered dignified as *Vibaha* proper, but was performed through religious ceremonies.[2] In Bengal, in some of the pure *Sudra* castes also, people were "permitted to keep widows as Samodhs".[3] In this respect, he states the general position as follows:

> "Except those of Brahmans, Rajpoots, Vaisyas, Bhats, Kayasthas, and some of the Banyas. all the widows of pure Hindus can live with men as samodhs."[4]

It can easily be appreciated that the marriage in the lower strata was not a sacred inviolable association, and the sexual frailities of women outside the kin-group alone were reprochable. A family in Indian society, however, could not come into existence without some definite matrimonial engagement on the basis of the rules of caste or social conventions.

## *Position of Women in Society*

It is the universal testimony of contemporary writers that an Indian wife generally was an embodiment of perfection, the integrity of her character was beyond reproach, her manners were strict, her demeanour was mild, gentle, and affectionate. She inspired "a very pleasing idea of female character," and, as Forbes says, the Indian women "seem formed to make good wives and good mothers; ignorant of the world, and the various temptations to which European females are liable, religious and domestic duties engross their chief attention."[5]

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, p. 186.
[2] *Ibid., II*, pp. 745-46.
[3] *Ibid., III*, p. 90.
[4] *Ibid., III*, p. 165.
[5] Forbes: *op. cit., II*, p. 110. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 10. Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 465. Raynal: *op. cit., II*, p. 34.

In the popular view woman was primarily intended for her role as a good wife and mother, and chastity and modesty were considered as her chief accomplishments. She was subject to threefold obediences: as a girl to her parents, as a wife to her husband, and last, if a widow, to her son. Her position in society was governed by the social ideals of family, and its patriarchal structure which made for the superiority of man. From her very infancy, strict notions of duty, etiquette, and moral obligations were infused into her mind so that she could make a dutiful daughter, be obedient wife, and an affectionate mother.[1] The eighteenth-century poet of Bengal, Bharatachandra, emphasizes how a good wife "served as a ministering angel to her family" and an impious one was an evil star on it. The ideal wife, *Uttama*, considered the welfare of her husband as her chief interest in life, returned good for evil done to her by her husband and always remained devoted to him.[2] The remarks of Forster are as true now as they were for this period:

> "The entire system of domestic ordinance and economy of the Hindoos is founded on a firm, yet simple, basis; from which arise effects, happy in themselves, and powerfully operative in uniting the bonds of society. By the ancient laws of the country, the wife depends for the enjoyment of every pleasure, as well as for most of the ordinary accommodations of her life on the immediate existence of the husband; and it becomes her invariable interest to preserve his health, as much of her happiness is centred on her living to an old age."[3]

It is emphasized that so long as her husband was alive, she remained the pivot of life in the family. On account of her influence over the husband, she exercised undisputed sway over household affairs, guided the course of its domestic and religious ceremonies, its feasting and festivals.[4] Dubois clearly states that the Hindu women enjoyed the complete confidence of their husbands, and were the guardians of family property, money, jewels and all. Their voice was the dominant factor in all the arrangements of family, the marriages of their sons and daughters,

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 316. Ali: *op. cit.*, *I* pp. 313-14.
[2] See Datta: *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40. [3] Forster. *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 57.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 340-41. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 164. Pillai: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 115. Ali: *op. cit. I*, pp. 314-15.

the distribution of alms and charities while in general they showed "a shrewdness, a savingness, and intelligence which would do honour to the best housewives in Europe".[1] This, however, does not deny that much of her happiness in society was dependent on her husband, particularly in the upper strata where she was not permitted to re-marry on the death of the husband. We are not surprised to find that she paid very delicate attention to him so much so that "when he is absent from home for any length of time, they (women) seldom wear their jewels or decorate themselves with ornaments, since the object they most wish to please is no longer in their presence."[2] Her life as a widow was, however, a life of mourning, a great calamity. She spent it in worship and recitals from sacred books, forsaking all the pleasures of life, its decorations, ornaments, perfumes and lively costumes.[3] Dubois says that she was not even allowed to participate in family ceremonies as her presence was thought to bring misfortune[4]. In the South, she could be easily identified among Hindus on account of her shorn head.[5] Pillai's reflections on the plight of the widow of Kana Karayac Maidali give us a clear idea of the agonies of her life as a widow, that she became often an object of contempt and maltreatment in the very family which she once ruled.[6]

From the standpoint of sexual character, society judged her by very severe standards. To a respectable girl, sexual life, apart from her conjugal life, was almost inconceivable. Her sexual indiscretions, if brought to light, entailed her excommunication and degradation. The laws of society, both in the upper and lower strata, were very severe for adultery and it was only on this ground that she could be divorced. Under the Peshwas, we come across a case in which a Rajput girl was detected in adultery and she was sold as a slave.[7] In 1807, we learn that before about 7000 spectators a young woman suspected of adultery by her husband was subjected to a trial

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 182.

[2] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 56.

[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 356-57. Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 57-8. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 56. *Araish-i-Mahfil*, pp. 46-7.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 150, footnote.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 357.

[6] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 402-05.

[7] *Selections from Raja Satara and Peshwa's Diaries*, *II*, case no. 103.

by ordeal by hot clarified butter.[1] Verelst points out that in the year 1762, a Bengali "detected one of his women in an act of infidelity", and he punished her by cutting off her nose. He was tried by the Calcutta Sessions and he confessed "that he had done nothing to offend the laws and customs in which he had been educated; that the woman was his property; and that by such customs, he had a right to set a mark upon her, for her infamy". He concludes that:

> "Throughout the East, women are wholly subject to the will of ther masters and every husband is the avenger of his own wrongs."[2]

Buchanan refers to cases in which sons put to death their own mothers who as young widows fell to temptations of sex.[3] Amongst Parsees also, the woman was expected to be singularly chaste and attached to the marriage tie.[4] We are informed that the system of child marriage popular in society was instrumental in promoting healthy married life, and high tone of moral life for the women.[5] In this conext the remarks of Craufurd are interesting:

> "The Hindoos are so scrupulous with regard to the virginity of their wives that they marry extremely young, although the consummation is deferred till the parties arrive at the age of puberty; nor will they marry a person with whom these symptoms have already appeared to which the sex is subject."[6]

As such a common social life both for man and woman in the 18th century was not feasible excepting in the family. Society did not recognize or encourage anything like free association of sexes either at family meals or public festivals.[7] Demonstrations of intimacy between man and woman through overt gestures like holding the arm in public were deemed highly indecent. The delights of a European damsel, such as dancing in public, were matters of disgrace for an Indian woman and were social taboos, except for professionals.[8] Raynal reports that when he talked to Banians at Surat that "freedom

1 *Calcutta Review, VII*, p. 423.
2 Verelst: *op. cit.*, p. 26.
3 Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 476.
4 Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 497.
5 Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 48. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 497. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, p 34. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*. pp. 8. 56; *II*, p. 110. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 42, 81; *II*, pp. 427, 476; *III*, p. 100.
6 Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 250.
7 Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 164.
8 Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 316, 340.

(of sex) was attended with no ill-consequence, they were not convinced, but shook their heads, and answered by one of their proverbs which signifies that if you bring butter too near the fire, you hardly keep it from melting".[1] The relations between man and woman and behaviour towards each other in public were characterized by remarkable restraint, reserve and courtesy free from the elements of frivolity. Indian society had a very sensitive conscience for its women, and in public, women were the objects of reverential treatment. Dubois says that a woman could go anywhere alone, "even in the most crowded places, and she need never fear the impertinent looks and jokes of idle loungers. A house inhabited solely by women is sanctuary which the most shameless libertine would not dream of violating. To touch a respectable woman even with the end of your finger would be considered highly indecorous."[2] The restraints imposed by society on the conduct of people in public prevented anything like a violent degeneration of sexual morals, and did great honour to feminine life.[3] Alexander Dow writes that "women are so sacred in India that even the common soldiery leave them unmolested in the midst of slaughter and devastation. The Harem is a sanctuary against all the licentiousness of victory; and ruffians covered with the blood of a husband shrink back with confusion from the secret apartments of his wives".[4] His statement is entirely corroborated by Forster that even the most intemperate Mussulmans committed no outrage as to shatter the sanctity of "the veil of the harem".[5] Buchanan reports that in some parts of the Company's possessions in the North he found that even to mention sex "in the most general manner", not to speak of female connections, was considered "an intolerable outrage".[6] There is no doubt that the code of behaviour towards women was highly dignified, and we have it on record how Sarfraz Khan, the weak-minded libertine ruler of Bengal maintaining a harem of 1500 women, had to suffer for his fondness for the daughter-in-law of Fateh Chand—Jagat Seth. His rabid insistence on having a look at her turned the influential banking house against him and gave strength to the opposite party led by Alivardi Khan.[7] We

[1] Raynal: *op. cit., II*, p. 34.
[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 342-43.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] Verelst: *op. cit.*, p. 138.
[5] Forster: *op. cit., I*, p. 175.
[6] Martin: *op. cit., I*, p. 112.
[7] Stewart: *op. cit.*, p. 495.

also know of Sirajuddaula's lust for Tara, the widowed daughter of the celebrated Rani Bhavani of Rajshahi, and his frantic efforts to have the pious girl alienated the Hindu chiefs and threw them into the Camp of the English.[1] As such, it is difficult to understand how Sirajuddaula could afford to indulge in certain acts of diabolical cruelty towards women with impunity mentioned in certain accounts of Roger Drake, the Governor of Calcutta and Monsieur Law, the French Chief of Cossimbazar factory.[2] They had formed a very poor opinion meted out to women. Verelst, for instance, says that "women in the east are transferred with little ceremony, and whether they be wives or concubines, the men seldom await their consent. Were our laws of rape and rules of evidence enforced, one-half of the males would incur the penalty of death".[3] In support of his argument, he points out that Mir Jafar presented Clive with many of Siraj's women after his defeat. It is rash to indict a whole people on the basis of the moral depravity of a single man in power and position in that age of degenerate aristocracy. Public opinion, however, was too sensitive to tolerate quietly and overt outrage on the life of women in society.

It would be erroneous to suppose that seclusion of women in society was rigorously in force among all classes. Exposure of "youthful beauty" was certainly considered "highly dangerous",[4] but confinement of women was practised in the upper strata and more so among Muslim respectable classes. Ali has described a high-class Muslim lady as "the bird from the nest immured in a cage" but cheerful, contented.[5] The use of the veil was popular with the Muslims and their women were more jealously guarded. and those who ranked above the peasants or menial classes considered it a matter of social respectability to seclude women from the "eye of strangers". "Little girls", says Ali, "when four years old, are kept strictly behind the purdah".[6] In South India, according to Dubois, "the custom of women veiling their faces" was

[1] Maitra: *Siraj* (Hindi Translation) pp. 75-80.
[2] Hill: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 123; *III*, p. 162.
[3] Verelst: *op. cit.*, p. 141, see footnote also. [4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 427.
[5] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 313.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 322, also Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 69-70. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 37. Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 309-10.

never practised.[1] But the system was in vogue with the women of Moplahs in Malabar.[2] Hindu society, though it did not encourage anything like free familiarity of the sexes, did not impose a curtain over woman's appearance in public. With the lower sections of the population, where women shared the drudgery of out-of-door work with men, it was impracticable.[3] At religious processions, at public places of worship, at social amusements like feats of jugglers, women are mentioned as the distinguished visitors.[4] They have been described in their light elegant *Saris*, their delicate gait and modest appearance going to the wells and tanks with a jar in their hand and pitcher on their head.[5] Grose noted their dexterity in changing their clothes after bath in a public tank at Surat as to afford "not the least glimpse of anything immodest".[6] The Bengali women, says the author of *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, "do not observe purdah, and go out of their houses for the performance of evacuations and other household duties".[7] Broughton refers to Maratha women, their bold look and manners, riding on horseback along with their husbands.[8] Rural life appears to be singularly free from the abuse of *Purdah*. Even in villages inhabited mostly by Brahmans in the south-west and Gujarat where the pastoral life in perfection was in existence and like "Rebeka and Rachael", women "draw water at the public wells, lead the cattle to pasture, wash their clothes in the tanks, and gather the flowers of the nymphia for their innocent sacrifice at the dewal, and its foliage for plants and dishes".[9]

It is clear that life of women in India was not so cribbed, cabined and confined as the missionary accounts of the period suggest.

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 344.
[2] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I* p. 11.
[3] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 19, 42, 92-3; *II*, p. 263. Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 121-22, 151. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 497-98. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 48.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 195-96.
[5] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 75-6.
[6] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 115.
[7] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 22.
[8] Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 116-17.
[9] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*. pp. 59-60, 104.

*Chapter Four*

# Religion and Society

RELIGION WAS AN active inspiration of Indian society in the 18th century. The whole country was dotted with temples dedicated to different gods. Many of them were relics of "immemorial antiquity" and others monuments of "stupendous labour". Robert Orme has characterized "the whole extent" of India as the holy land to its inhabitants.[1] About the extreme South, Abbe de Guyon wrote that temples or pagodas were most frequently to be met with. People had them "in their cities, in their palaces, in private houses, in the open fields, in forests and caverns, on the wayside and the banks of rivers".[2] The passion of people for their creed and all that they understood by it was undoubtedly genuine. Dubois was struck with "the essentially religious" temperament of the Hindus in South India,[3] and Scrafton noted that in Bengal people were "equally ready to resign their lives to preserve their religious purity".[4] Ali dilates on the "zealous emulative spirit and enthusiasm" of the followers of the Prophet, their belief in his prophetic mission, the miracles which occurred to his family and the Scriptures.[5] Like Hindus, they were equally strict in the observances of their religious fasts and celebration of their religious festivals.[6] The Ramzan fast was undertaken by the upper strata as a religious duty and by the lower as a command and the ladies observed it with equal rigidity.[7] Even children were encouraged "to pull

[1] Orme: *op cit.*, *I*, p. 2.

[2] Abbe de Guyon: *History*, *I*, pp. 424-5. Craufurd says that the inauguration of a temple was attended with great ceremony and expense. It was dedicated to some deity and had its annual festival to which pilgrims resorted from distant places. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 100-01.

[3] Dubois: *op cit.*, p. 9.

[4] Scrafton. *op. cit.*, p. 11. Forbes also writes, "I sometimes almost envied these peaceful Hindus the pleasures they enjoyed in the performance of their religious duties and the delights of social worship." Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 523-4.

[5] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 137, 205.

[6] *Ibid.*, also Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 474-6.

[7] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 179-81.

through the trial" of the fast and on account of its severity, says Ali, they often died.[1] Their belief in the efficacy of pilgrimage to Mecca was profound and many were willingly prepared to endure the fatigue and privations of the journey. She writes:

> "Every year may be witnessed in India the Mussulmans of both sections forming themselves into Kauflahs to pursue their march on their joyous expedition, believing as they do so that they are fulfilling a sacred duty. The expenses of the women of the middle and lower classes were met by the ladies of the rich families."[2]

Among the Parsees, we are informed that there were a few who did not believe that the holy fire which their ancestors brought with them on their memorable flight from Persia had continued burning in like manner in their ancient temple at Daman. Their adoration of fire was carried to the extent that they hesitated in putting out a burning lamp or a candle. If on any occasion fire broke out in any of their houses, they would not extinguish it by water, but demolish the adjacent buildings, leaving the flames to disappear into the void.[3] Undoubtedly religion exercised powerful influence over the minds of men and moulded their character.

## *Sectarianism*

Sectarianism was a salient feature of the religious life of the people. Every religion had branched off into numerous sects, and among the Hindus the orthodox cults of Siva and Vishnu had further split into innumerable sub-sects.[4] Though people were very much eclectic in their outlook, and the main stream of popular religion was broad and complicated in its range of worship, yet the predominance of different sects varied in the different regions. India to the north-west of Bengal was dominated by Vaishnavism. Rama and Sita were the popular objects

[1] *Ibid.*, pp. 188-89. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 207-08.

[3] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 32. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 3-5.

[4] Wilson: *Asiatic Researches*, *XVI* and *XVII*. Coleman: *Miscellaneous Essays*, *I*, pp. 196-99. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*. pp. 198-211, 216; *II*, pp. 487-88; *III*, pp. 523-24. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 100, 112-13, 696.
For Jains see Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 218-22. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 143 240, 333, 421; *II*, pp. 74-5. For Muslims see Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 243-49.

of worship. At many places which now belong to the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, the worship of Kali, according to Buchanan, was unknown prior to the British conquest.[1] In Bengal the popular forms of worship were influenced by Saiva cults. The Tantric sciences called *Agam* provided intellectual sustenance to these cults.[2] In South India, the population was both Vaishnavite and Saivite. The Brahmans were mostly the former, while the worshippers of Siva and their priests were, according to Dubois, drawn entirely from the *Sudra* caste.[3]

In North India, the followers of Vishnu were mostly divided into four sects or *Sampradayas*, Rudra, Sri, Brahma, and Sanak, named after different religious leaders like Sankar, Ramanuja and Ramanand. At some places the followers of the Sri order were called Ramayats and those of the Sanak as Nimayats.[4] The followers of Vishnu worshipped chiefly Rama and Krishna, and in South India Narayan.[5] In Bengal, the followers of Siva were divided into three schools—Dayabhava, Posubhava and Virbhava—and their favourite objects of worship were Kali and Durga.[6] Besides these, there were the followers of other sects like Kabirpanthis, Nanakpanthis, Radhavallabhis, Ramanandis,

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 153, 187; *II*, p. 477.

[2] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 732; *III*, pp. 520-23.

[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 112-14, 128.

In an account of the charities of the Holkar rulers of the later eighteenth century who were personally Saivas, we have an elaborate account of the sacred places of the Saiva school.

(a) The twelve sacred Jyotirlingas spread over the vast sub-continent of Bharatkhand were as follows:—

1. Somnath in Kathiawar; 2. Mallikarjun in Madras presidency; 3. Mahankaleshwar in Ujjain, 4. Onkareshwar in Central India; 5 Vaijnath in the Nizam's territory; 6. Bhimashankar in Manarashtra; 7. Rameshwar on the eastern coast; 8. Naganath in the Nizam's territory; 9. Vishwanath in Banaras; 10. Trimbak near Nasik; 11 Kedareshwar in the Himalayas; 12. Grishneshwar in Verul (Nizam's territory).

(b) The Saptapuris or the seven sacred cities were Ayodhya, Mathura, Maya (Hardwar), Kashi, Kanchi, Avantika (Ujjain) and Dwarka.

(c) The four quarters in the four directions where Sri Shankar-Acharya had founded a Math were Badrinarayan, Dwarka, Rameshwar and Jagannath.

—*Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission, *XIII*, pp. 140-42.

[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 198; *II*, pp. 487-88; *III*, pp. 523-24, 562.

[5] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 188. [6] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 188; *III*, pp. 520-23.

and so on.[1] In Bengal, the followers of Chaitanya also constituted a distinct Vaishnavite sect. Ward says that they placed great reliance on devotion and considered divine knowledge of secondary importance. He writes:

> "Some of these persons express attachment to their guardian deity in the most familiar acts of devotion as his friends or servants; in songs or prayers; by bowing or making offerings to his image; by washing its feet; by repeating his name, or listening to his praise, or meditating on his qualities."[2]

Buchanan mentions another interesting sect, Sakhibhava Vaishnavas, with its chief seat in the territory of Gaur. Its followers dressed like girls, assumed famale names, danced in honour of Krishna and also acted as religious guides of the lower classes. This sect was, however, not very popular.[3] It is stated that among Rajputs in Bihar, the followers of the Surya sect were also numerous. Most of them are mentioned as not taking their food "for three months ... while thesun is above the horizon, which is meant as a compliment to that luminary".[4]

In South India, according to Dubois, there were four principal sects of the Brahmans: the Vaishnavites, the Smarthas, the Tatuavadis and the Utrassas. He, however, does not enlighten us on their doctrinal aspects.[5] According to Buchanan, the Smarthas were quite numerous and that they prayed both to Siva and Vishnu. The Brahmans of this sect did not propitiate Siva by observing bloody rites as did the *Sudra* flock, and Sringa-giri in Mysore province is mentioned as the chief seat of their highest priest. Sankaracharya was stated to have established a *Math* there.[6] In the non-Brahman population, the Lingaits are the most devout followers of Siva. They constantly wore the symbol of their sect in a silver casket round their necks. According to their creed, life was a cycle of *Janama* (birth), *Gamana* (movement) and *Marana* (death) and the man who performed his religious duties was to be exempt from this cycle and be united with the divine spirit. They condemned "the incessant detail of external ceremonies, which among the Brahmans of every persuasion occupies the largest portion of their time, and forms the great business

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 152, 198-211. [2] Ward: *History*, *I*, pp. x-xi.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 177. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 167.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 109-10. [6] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 304-05.

of their lives". Their priests were often drawn from low servile castes. In the opinion of Wilks, the sect flourished in every part of South India, and was the work of "a rational reformer".[1]

Amongst Muslims there were other sects besides the two orthodox divisions—Shia and Sunni. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the Muslim weavers had organized themselves into a separate sect and followed Kabir as their chief Guru although they also believed in the Prophet. They used large beads for saying prayers.[2] The Bohras, an enterprising trading class, figure as a separate sect with a separate priestly organization. In Central India, Ujjain was the seat of their chief priest and Surat that of the highest priest. The authority of the latter extended over all, and he promulgated for their conduct annually a "table of rules".[3]

On course, the degrees of attachment to the sect varied in different regions. In Bengal and South India, the votaries of the different sects gloried in displaying their sectarian attachment through outward marks and signs.[4] In the South, the devotees of Vishnu painted on their foreheads the sign of *Naman* consisting of three lines—one perpendicular and two oblique meeting at the base and resembling a trident. The followers of Siva rubbed their foreheads with "cow-dung ashes", and carried the *Lingam* fastened either round the arm or to their hair.[5] The spirit of the sect was, however, on the decline to the west of Bengal in Northern India, where orthodoxy and sectarian outlook were not at all marked at the beginning of the 19th century. It is emphasized that as a general rule the Hindus in Bihar did not bind themselves to any particular sect, and did not consult any sage "to receive secret form of worship". About Brahmans, too, Buchanan writes:

"These are at perfect liberty to apply to any god that comes in their way; and when agitated by strong hopes or fears are not behind their neighbours in the earnestness of their offerings."[6]

Contemporary accounts show that in Hinduism in particular,

[1] Wilks: *op. cit.*, *I*, Appendix No. 4, pp. 503-06, also Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 27-8; *III*, pp. 264-66.

[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 446. [3] Malcolm: *II*, *op. cit.*, p. 112, footnote.

[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 182-83. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 14. Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 38. [5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 112-3.

[6] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 187, also *II*, pp. 732, 742, 776. Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. xi-xii.

as in the organization of the Christian church, every sect had its independent priestly order and that the chief priest, called Guru or *Mahant*, wielded very wide spiritual powers over its members. In matters relating to the sect, he exercised an authority which none could challenge. His headquarters were known as *Simhassana* and there were various dioceses or *Maths*, under him, scattered in different parts of the country, which were supervised by subordinate priests. He punished transgressions of the rules of the sect, excommunicated the unbelievers and himself constituted the highest tribune of appeal. Dubois tells that unlike the Christian priests, these were not necessarily required to be celibate,[1] and Buchanan confirms it by stating how in certain sects, particularly of Sri Vaishnavas and Smartha Brahmans, the headship had degenerated into a hereditary institution irrespective of saintliness. In these sects, the gurus were also performing functions which formed properly the jurisdiction of caste councils, inflicting punishments even for non-religious lapses.[2] The pomp and ostentation with which these spiritual heads emerged out of their hallowed dens for inspection of their far-flung establishments has been vividly described by Europeans. They appeared in public not like a simple saint but with the grandeur of a potentate.[3] So much sanctity was attached to these living gods of religion, particularly those of the Brahman caste, that their holiness was liable to be polluted by plebeian breath. The credulous followers often drank with avidity the water which washed the impurities of their feet.[4]

## *Asceticism*

Every religion prizes saintliness as the supreme virtue. In India also one who could conquer the self and rise above the limitations that the body imposes on man was considered to have acquired the highest religious merit. Among the Hindu masses, the *Vairagis*, the naked devotees, Yogis, and *Sanyasis* were held in universal esteem; their penances, austere exercise, control of

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 131. [2] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 145-46, 306-07.

[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 129-30. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 124-25.

[4] Forbes: *op. cit*, *I*, p. 125. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 132-33. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 430-34.

passion evoked popular appreciation.[1] Among Muslims, the ideal of the *Darvesh* was the ideal of the perfectibility of human nature. The Sufi saints, "who have forsaken entirely all attachment to earthly things, in their adoration of the one supreme God", "shelling themselves up for several weeks together in a hut of mud", were very much venerated in society. There were innumerable orders of Sufis and *Fakirs* whose members practised severe penances and emotional ecstatic modes of worship like those of the Hindus.[2] European writers have vividly described the many physical tortures that the Indian ascetics inflicted on themselves for attaining spiritual bliss. Many suffered their bodies to grow crooked, while others held up arms perpendicularly above their heads for years. Worshippers of the Phallic deity in the South fixed large iron rings and chains to their bodies. On the Coromandal coast, Pundarams with their bodies smeared with ashes went about singing hymns while the Tadinums ceaselessly beat their rings and went about with alms bowels. Many devotees remained stuck to their solitary places for years, clad in dust and cow-dung ash.[3] Poster mentions a sect of Hindu ascetics near Varanasi "who, it is said, forbear making any use of their hands even on the most necessary occasions; but are fed and assisted by others".[4] Stavorinus mentions towards the south-west one Baba Saheb, a Hindu saint, with body, head and face covered with ashes. It is said about him that "even the Maratha chiefs went in person to pay their respects".[5] Jonathan Duncan gives a personal account of two illustrious devotees at Varanasi, one Urdhabahu, so called because of his arms and hands were in a fixed position over his head. He was described as a "very intelligent man" and "a great traveller". He was a resident of Kannauj of Khattri tribe. At the age of nine, he had left his home, proceeded to Bithur on the banks of the Ganga and became a *Sadhu*. Out of the "eighteen different forms of Tupisya", he made choice of the one mentioned above.[6] To

[1] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 121, 127-28. Dubois *op. cit.*, p. 257.

[2] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 243-45.

[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 128-29. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 48-50; *II*, pp. 69, 73, 141. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 35. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 407, 432-34; *II*, p 492. Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xxxviii. [4] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 218, footnote.

[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 171-72. [6] *Asiatic Researches*, *V*, pp. 37-8.

Duncan he gave an account of his wanderings in Ceylon, Malaya, Nepal, Tibet, Balkh, Persian Gulf, as far as "Mosco".[1] The other Brahmachari, by name "Perkasanand", lay reclining on his bed of iron spikes. In the cold season, water constantly fell "on his head from a perforated pot placed in a frame at some height above him; and yet he seems contented, and to enjoy good health and spirits".[2] These penitents, subsisting on public alms, travelled widely and suffered a great deal for their faith.

Asceticism was also commended as a priestly virtue, though Dubois says that in Hindu families a married priest was preferable for presiding over family ceremonies.[3] Among the Sikhs and Jains, however, the priestly class was the one which had renounced the pleasures of the world to guide the religious interests of their sects.[4] It has already been observed that among Hindus and Muslims there were innumerable religious sects of *Sanyasis* and *Fakirs*. Sher Ali Jafari "Afsos" has classified the Hindu devotees into five categories. The first were the *Sanyasis* who forsook "all sensual desires and carnal appetites", took to fasting and abstinence, did not care for appearance, covered their bodies with dirt and formed their hair into clots. They practised severe exercises and devotion, continually praying. Outwardly they looked wretched but inwardly "they are most wealthy". The second were the Yogis who, besides saying prayers, practised yogic exercises holding the breath for a long time and "other strict austerities". They were reputed to live for "hundreds of years", could cause their "souls to flee away whenever they pleased, assume whatever form they liked, enter the body of another person, and tell all the news of the absent ones (the invisible world)". Their art in sorcery, alchemy and chemistry was more skilled than that of the *Sanyasis*. The third were the *Vairagis* "full of devotion" and "strict in their penances", the devotees of Rama, who, getting into a state of ecstacy, would begin "to dance involuntarily". Amongst them there were many devotional sects, called after the names of their chiefs. The fourth were the *Udasis*, also called the Nanakpanthis chanting songs

[1] *Asiatic Researches, V*, pp. 38-46. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 46-7.
[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 131, 139.
[4] Martin: *op. cit., III*, pp. 181-2. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, India, *III*, p. 80.

and verses, constantly eulogizing God. The fifth were the "Jatis Seoras", distinguished by their rags and severe fastings, who plucked out their hair with their own hands. They did not believe in the theory of future punishments, discarded belief in God, "for the precept of their teachers is this, that as the grass grows by itself, and no one sows it, so also is the birth of man and animals, and in short it always was so".[1] His account implies that in his day Sikhism and Jainism were included within the pale of Hinduism, as the fourth and fifth classes were evidently related to the two respectively.

In connection with absolute non-worldliness encouraged by religion, certain facts require to be emphasized. The rank and file of most of the ascetic sects was manned by enthusiastic recruits from the lower strata of the population. These people were also acting as priests to people of the lower castes, as in their organizations, distinctions of caste almost disappeared after admission.[2] Craufurd plainly states that "the Brahmans neither go naked, nor commit any of these acts of extravagance". Their lives were disinclined towards studies.[3] Society was also alive to the possible degeneration in the monastic ideals and did not recommend it for women.[4] Female *Sanyasins* are, however, mentioned but there is nothing to show that people had a tender conscience for them.[5] In South India, we also come across priestesses attached to temples both of Vishnu and Siva cults. The former were called Garudabasavis and had that image of Garud tatooed "on their breasts"; the latter, Lingabasvis, bore that sign tattooed on their thighs.[6] There is also strong evidence in favour of the fact that the ascetic ideals of religion were being abused. The uncritical charity in the name of religion encouraged mendicancy in the lower classes, and *Fakirs* and *Vairagis* of doubtful religious merits swarmed the entire social polity.[7] What is distressing is

[1] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, pp. 39-41.

[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 196-7; *II*, pp. 755-56; *III*, pp. 147-48. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 123.

[3] Craufurd. *op. cit.*, p. 130. [4] Ward: *op. cit.*, *I*, p xiii.

[5] Forbes: *op. cit*, *I*, p. 125. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 133-14.

[6] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 133-34.

[7] Martin: *op. cit. II*, p. 428; *III*, pp. 126-27, 147-48. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 242, 248-49, 324-25. *II*, pp. 76-7. Duff: *India and Missions*, pp. 164-65. Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 204-05. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 481. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 113-14, 118-24.

the fact that a strong class of married religious mendicants was in existence, living idly either on past endowments or begging in North as well as South India.[1]

The contemporary accounts suggest the existence of numerous ascetic organizations, supported by charities and landed endowments. In Northern India, the order of Dasnami *Sanyasis* was a powerful organization supposed to be founded by Sankar-acharya. Buchanan says that at some places *Sudras* were not admitted to it generally but after admission caste distinctions were not observed.[2] Most of these were strenuous mendicants affecting a life of mortification, undertaking "long and dangerous pilgrimages". They resided in their convents under the jurisdiction of *Mahants*. They also acted as Gurus to all those who accepted them as such.[3] The different *Sampradayas* of the Vishnu cult, too, had their separate monastic orders or *Akharas*.[4] Of these, the order of Ramanandis has been especially mentioned, as it attracted many young Brahmans who renounced the world. They lived in small convents of five or six spread in different parts of Bengal.[5] With the low caste devotees of Vishnu, the order of Vaishnavas was most popular. They lived on begging and were good musicians. Buchanan compares them to the Satnami mendicants of South India.[6] The order of Kanphata Yogis was an interesting organization in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The lower classes considered their prayers as "peculiarly efficacious in restoring children to health". The order was said to be founded by one Gorakhnath "considered as the supreme being, but endowed with body and form". Its members were also called Kapaliks "because they keep human skulls, out of which at their horrid rites they drink spirituous liquors, and offer human sacrifices". The Yogis of this sect denied the truth of such popular allegations against them to Buchanan.[7] The Aghorpanthis are

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*. *III*, pp. 146-47, 498-99. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 76-7.

[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 197.
At some places, the Dasnami sanyasis were called Gosains and they were generally of lower castes. Buchanan enumerates their ten sub-divisions on the basis of places and penances as follows:
Giri, Puri, Bharati, Ban, Arariya, Parabat, Sagar, Saraswaty, Yati and Dandi. *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 173.

[3] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 197.

[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 198-200.

[5] *Ibid.*, *II*, pp. 752-53.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 754-55.

[7] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 484-85.

stated to have constituted another similar monastic order. Buchanan compares them to the philosophers of ancient times, who "have neither shame, nor a sense of decency, and commit everything that shocks the common customs of their countrymen". They were also very much detested by society.[1] In South India, we come across various ascetic sects such as Pundarams, Sarvakas, Savaram, Saivam, Ganpatyam, Vamana, Pashandi, etc., but it is difficult to offer comments on them for lack of reliable data.[2] The ascetic sects flourished in every religion. Among the Jains, the two sects—Swetambar and Digambar—had their separate monastic orders.[3] Among the Sikhs, the Akalis are mentioned as priests, and the temple at Amritsar, where the sacred works were placed "under a silken canopy", was their most sacred Gurdwara.[4]

## *Ceremonies and Rituals*

A notable feature of the religious life of people was the great emphasis laid on observances of ceremonies and rituals connected with religion. According to Dubois, the Hindus looked upon ceremonies as means of purifying the soul, and seeking redemption from sin. They consequently observed these unscrupulously as their omission, even of "the most minute of them", was liable to cause "scandal". Poverty alone was a possible excuse for neglecting those which entailed huge expenditure.[5] According to Forster, a free thinker was not known to society and he found that even celebrated personalities like Nana, Mahadaji, etc., were religious-minded and performed "even minute ceremonies with due attention.[6] The popular mode of worship, he observed, was "now grossly entangled with ceremony and emblem".[7] Buchanan too emphasizes:

> "In the observances of these ceremonies, every Hindu, who can possibly spare time, seems to place his chief glory; and he consumes in a most miserable manner the hours that were granted for nobler purposes."[8]

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 492-94.
[2] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 143-44; *II*, 74-5, 174, 330.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 215-16.
[4] *Asiatic Annual Register*—1809, Miscellanous Tracts, p. 430.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 494.
[6] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 61.
[7] *Ibid.*, Footnote, p. 61.
[8] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 741.

Besides, religion also enjoined strict performance of domestic religious ceremonies at births, marriages and funerals, and all these were held vitally important in the Indian family. People in the upper strata had a Guru exclusively attached to their family for supervising their household ceremonies.[1]

The priest naturally occupied a high place in society because he was the sole interpreter of the ritual of religion and officiated at public and private ceremonies.[2] Pillai says that the priest tutored his pupils in "mystical verses supposed to convey spiritual light to their souls".[3] Among the Hindus, as also among the Parsees, children could be initiated into religion only through a priest. Among the former, the ceremony was called *Diksha*[4]. About the children of the Parsees, Stavorinus writes that when they were seven years old, the priest gave them "a narrow woollen bandage, woven by the wives of the priests, which is wound three times round the body over the shirt, and which they must wear as long as they live: whenever it is worn out another is furnished by the priest, to whom a certain fixed price must be paid for it".[5] Their priests were called Dastoors, and they exercised great influence in their society.[6] Under the influence of the Indian environment, Islam, although it did not sanction the elaborate ritual of the Hindus, set up a priestly community thriving on religion. Ghulam Hussain mentions how the Kazis in Bengal had grown into an extortionist class, that unless their dues were paid the rites of marriage, and circumcision could not be performed and even the dead were not allowed "to quit the house". People were degraded in society if their dues were not discharged.[7]

Owing to the intensity of religious life in the country, social charity in the name of religion was always abundantly forthcoming.[8] The priests attached to temples and mosques had large landed endowments besides the proceeds of worship. Among

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 128. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 135-38.

[3] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 241. [4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 119.

[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 499-500. The girls were initiated into religion on marriage. *Ibid.*

[6] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 223-24. They had the authority to arbitrate even in their social disputes. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 496-98; *III*, pp. 1-5.

[7] *Sair-Mutacherin*, *III*, pp. 165-66. [8] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 499.

the Muslims, the Mollas working in the mosques held their office by hereditary privilege, and they had also large incomes from the people who utilized them for praying and fasting for their benefit in the other world.[1] Religion, in fact, was the greatest feudal organization enjoying large vested interests in landed property. The temples of South India are mentioned as maintaining large staff of priests, dancing girls, menial attendants, etc., and worship in them besides being artistic was highly expensive.[2]

The priestly community was also the most conservative part of the population "loudest in condemning those who violated" "the ancient customs". Dubois, however, gives it the credit of preserving books of history or science through revolutions in the past.[3]

## *Inter-Sect Relations*

With all its sectarian diversification, the religion of the Hindus was characterized by extreme liberality. Strictly speaking, the existence of the various sects did not intensify separation and there was visible a peculiar uniformity in the religious outlook and practices of the Hindu population. Their objects of worship, the gods of different sects, were not competing for supremacy. The devout worshippers of Rama had no objection "to repeat the ceremonies used in the adoration of Siva, or of any other God".[4] Religious fanaticism, forbidding communion with the followers of other sects, was not a feature of the Hindus. It is also true that the masses were ignorant of the subtle distinctions between various sects. Neither did a difference of sect contribute to a difference of caste, and there was nothing to check the son of a Saivite from becoming a Vaishnavite. On the contrary, the phenomenon was a frequent occurrence. People of different sects, if they were of the same caste, ate together and intermarried and the woman generally adopted the "religion of her husband".[5] Not infrequently in the Hindu family, the husband and the wife belonged to different sects but this apparent inconsistency did not obstruct their conjugal life

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 206-08; *II*, pp. 283-84; also *I*, p. 143; *II*, pp. 109-10, 446-47, 724-25. Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 150-51. [2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, 591-97.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 139. [4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 153.

[5] *Ibid.*, also Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 309.

or disturb the peace of the household. Dubois asserts that, in fact, among the Hindus change from one sect to another was not an uncommon thing.[1] Forbes very aptly describes the general religious outlook of the Hindus:

> "Religious disputes and unavailing controversies seldom disturb the peace of a Hindoo; contentedly he adopts the rites and ceremonies of his forefathers, believes in their tenets, performs his stated ablutions, and keeps the appointed festivals; nor by free enquiries, and freer opinions, does he disturb the peace of others, or permit them to interrupt his own."[2]

Among the Hindus, divergence of religious views did not create dissensions or foment "crimes of all kinds which for centuries were the result of religious fanaticism in Europe and elsewhere".[3] This, however, does not imply that the state of religious learning was very low in the country. The educated sections of the Hindus held enlightened views on religious matters and very much depreciated the superstitious rites of the backward part of the population.[4] They were, however, never emotionally strained by the differences in religious views and practices, and were on no account ready to take up cudgels in the name of religion. As Dubois says, "However they do not carry their purely scholastic difference to the point of reciprocal hatred or persecution; and the subjects under dispute are very much the same as those which provoke polemical discussions among scholars and dialecticians in other countries."[5] The attitude of the learned Brahmans, the custodians of the religious interests of the Hindus, deserves special mention. Their tolerance and rationalism were remarkable. They permitted every one to go to heaven through his own way, holding the belief "that every religion is peculiarly adapted to the country and people where it is practised, and that all, in their original purity, are equally acceptable to God".[6] They also strongly disapproved of the existence of numerous sects exclusive in their

1 Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 119-20.

2 Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 59.

3 Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 120-21.

4 Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 134, 141, 183-85. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 126, *II*, pp. 137-38. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 417, 432. Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. LXXIV-LXXV.

5 Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 112.

6 Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 132. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 137-38.

doctrines and worship, and openly scoffed at the corruption of religion in the lower strata of the population. They also did not countenance the religious excitement and fervour of the ignorant masses.[1] The very religion over which they presided as priests was severely criticized and condemned by some of them.[2] The French missionary, however, mentions that generally the interests of their class did not permit them to combat the errors of popular religion, though naturally he feels that "owing to their numbers" and "the high estimation in which they are held by the public", they could "overthrow the entire edifice of idolatory throughout the whole of India, and substitute the knowledge and worship of the true God, of whom they already possess so perfect an idea".[3]

European observers did not fail to notice their attitude towards the Christian religion, which, according to some, was not one of implacable hostility. In many respects, particularly its emphasis on the purity of the life of the individual, it was presumed to have secured their appreciation. Impressed by Dubois' manners, some Brahmans in the South invited him even to their temples and permitted him to attend their religious ceremonies. They helped him also in obtaining a site and materials for the contruction of his Church.[4] They did not apprehend in this any positive danger to their religion; and their superior confidence was shared by their co-religionists of other castes also. "Being fully persuaded of the superlative merits of their own manners and customs", says Dubois, "the Hindoos think those of other people barbarous and detestable, and quite incompatible with real civilization."[5] Hence they had no fears in permitting the propagation of the Christian faith.

The Europeans with the incubus of inquisition haunting their vision failed to reconcile the deep religious temperament of the Hindus with their sober tolerant outlook, and made all sorts of conjectures on the nature of Hinduism as a religion. Grose says:

"Nothing appeared more paradoxical to me than the violent tenaciousness of the Gentoos (Hindus) in their religion and customs; and yet at the same time their perfect acquiescence,

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 298-301. [2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 298-301.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 301. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 302. [5] *Ibid.*

humanity, and toleration of others who differ from them in these points so sacred to them."[1]

For their attachment to their religion and customs, he puts forward the physical consideration, "the weak flimsy texture of their bodies chiefly, and especially of the Brahmins and Baniyas, raised upon rice, vegetables and water", their effeminacy and incapability of "a strong and manly exertion of their reason, to shake off the yoke of a prejudice once thoroughly imbibed."[2] His explanation of their toleration is, however, admissible:

"As to that spirit of toleration in religion, for which the Gentoos are so singularly distinguished, it is doubtless owing to their fundamental tenet of it, of which the purpose is: "that the diversity of modes of worship is apparently agreeable to the God of the universe; that all prayers put to him from man are all equally acceptable and sanctified to him, by the sincerity of the intention; that the true universal religion is no other than the religion of the heart. . . ."

From this it naturally followed that change of religion was "at best but a dangerous and needless experiment".[3]

## *Toleration*

In society this spirit of toleration was shared by Hindus with the other religious groups also. During the period, the religious life of the people was singularly free from violent symptoms of bigotry, fanaticisim, or communalism on account of religion. All accounts impress that inter-communal relations were healthy and the antagonism of sects and creeds had melted into appreciation and tolerance. Stavorinus, the Dutch traveller (1765-76), wrote about life in the south-west Peninsula as follows:

"These three distinct nations the Moors (Muslims), the Gentoos (Hindus) and the Parsees, whose religions are widely different from each other, exercise the greatest toleration and indulgence in this respect towards one another; no one is molested on account of his religion: they may be seen together in, and near, the river, offering up their prayers, each to that being whom he adores, without any marks of derision or con-

[1] Grose: *Voyage*, *I*, p. 182, [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 182-83. [3] *Ibid.* p. 183.

tempt being shown by any one: this even goes so far that the days which one persuasion looks upon as holy are also looked upon with a degree of veneration by the others. While the holy fire of the Parsees is exhibited to the people, no Gentoo will even approach or touch fire, no more than the Parsees themselves."[1]

Even in Malabar, the stronghold of Hindu orthodoxy, the small Jewish community freely followed its tenets without reproach or opposition from those of different faiths.[2] Of Muslims on that side, Grose noted that they "seem to release of that vigour and fondness for making proselytes" and that at Surat under the Mughal Nawab all religions were tolerated.[3] Life was not at all disturbed by communal passions in territories under the Maratha government also. About 1799, William Henry Tone, serving in a Regiment of Infantry under the Peshwas, wrote about Poona:

"In Poonah, which is the metropolis of the Empire, and the seat of Brahmanical authority, there are many mosques, and one Christian church, where the votaries of both religions may offer up their devotions without any hindrance or molestation. What a noble example of moderation is this, especially when contrasted with the bigoted and sanguinary principle of Christian and Mahomedan zealots."[4]

About Northern India, Ali states that the outside observer could scarcely read marked difference in the life of the common people of the two persuasions. There was remarkable similarity in their habits, in celebrations of their festivals, and tolerance of each other's customs. In the rural areas, the women of the rival faiths mixed with each other on terms of intimacy.[5] Twining of the Bengal Civil Service, visiting Northern India in the last decade of the 18th century, does not refer to communal bitterness. At holy places like Varanasi, too, the relations between "the haughty Mussulman and the humble Hindoo" were peaceful.[6] About people of Central India, Malcolm writes:

[1] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 6. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 224-25.

[3] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 117.

[4] *Asiatic Annual Register, 1799*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 125.

[5] Ali: *op. cit.* *I*, pp. 55, 389-90; *II*, pp. 112, 349.

[6] Twining: *Travels*, p. 332.

"There are many institutions, festivals, religious and superstitious beliefs, and usages, in Central India, which may be described as belonging equally to all its Hindu population, and indeed to the greatest proportion of the Mahomedan."[1]

In the period under review, the relations between Hinduism and Islam show remarkable intimacy of feeling. Forbes says "that now the professions of both religions have acquired a habit of looking each other with an eye of indulgence unusual in other countries between those who maintain such opposite tenets".[2] What possibly could disturb the relations was the missionary zeal of the priestly classes. In this connection it may be emphasized that the spirit of Hinduism was absolutely against it. In fact it was a "closed church". It did not permit proselytism and it was a popular belief that the individual must be born a Hindu, or he could not become one.[3] The followers of Zoroaster, too, like them did not admit of proselytism. Their worship in their temples was not open to all, and they were very careful in avoiding racial intermixture with other groups.[4] About Islam and Sikhism, it is reported that they were expanding religions and their priests were engaged in some missionary activity. But there is no evidence that it was in any way offensive or prejudicial to the interests of society.[5] It would not be rash to conclude that in the eighteenth century religion was more or less a matter of personal faith and not a source of strife in society. It was only in Bengal that at the close of the century the serenity of the religious life of the people had come to be ruffled by Christian missionary propaganda. The abusive remarks of Missionaries like Claudius Buchanan, Vice-Provost of Fort William College, Henry Martin and Brown, etc., created certain alarm in the educated classes of society, and the Company's sepoy battalions.[6] Their sectarian propaganda, however, could not disturb the communal relations between Hinduism and Islam. The healthy traditions of cultural life in which the masses joined together in similar beliefs and practices, superstitions and

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit., II*, p. 190. [2] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 486.
[3] *Ibid., I*, p. 41; *II*, p. 138. Dow: *op. cit., I*, p. xxiv. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 132. [4] Stavorinus: *op. cit., II*, pp. 496-98; *III*, pp. 1-5.
[5] Martin: *op. cit., I*, p. 140; *II*, p. 445; *III*, pp. 180-82.
[6] Waring: *Observations on the Present State of the East India Company*, pp. xxxxi.

credulities, which had been evolved earlier, continued to dominate religious life. The cultural synthesis between the two great communities at religious level, which was most pronounced in Northern India, where Islam claimed a large following, makes a pleasant study in connection with social life in the 18th century.

## *Religious Synthesis*

We have observed how religion in this country prized asceticism over worldliness and emphasized that material happiness and prosperity is not the goal of human life. In Indian society, people reputed holy and saintly exercised hypnotic influence over popular imagination and in the 18th century worship of saints was a great unifying factor in the religious life of the masses, Hindu and Muslim. The innumerable altars raised to the memory of saints of the past, the voluntary contributions made for the maintenance of these monuments, the ease with which they became centres of religious congregations testify to the popularity of saint worship.

In the Punjab, at Dapaldal, about four *Kos* from Patiala, was the shrine of Shah Shamsuddin Dariyai, whose miracles and marvels were "on the tongue of all the people". His shrine is mentioned as the place of worship of all, small and great, and every Thursday they collected there, particularly on the Thursday of the New Moon. People flocked from distances to offer their oblations in the hope of fulfilling their wishes. According to Sher Ali Jafri, these were the Hindu servants who looked after that great shrine. At a near place, Dhayanpur, was the native place of Baba Lal, "a very orthodox and holy devotee" with whom Dara Shikoh was supposed to be intimate. His poems composed in Hindi were read by people "by way of daily devotions, and many great and common people believe in him".[1] At Jallundhar, the tomb of Sultan Nasiruddin was a popular place of worship and especially during the summers "lots of people go there to worship, and offer up prayers and oblations at his tomb".[2] The monument of Shah Arzani at Patna had

[1] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, pp. 125-26. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 123.

a considerable endowment and its custodian distributed food daily to "from 50 to 200 fakirs". Buchanan writes:

"Every Thursday night 100 to 500 pilgrims, Moslems and Hindus, many of them from a distance, come to intercede with the saint for his assistance, and make offerings. In the month of Zikad (Zil-qad) there is an annual fair, which lasts three days. On the first people apply to Shah Shujawal; on the second to Vasunt; and on the third to the great saint; the two former having been among his successors, . . . About 5000 votaries attend".[1]

Such monuments of saints were spread all over the north-eastern India, and were considered holy places where Hindus and Muslims alike knelt in profound devotion to invoke the blessings of the saints.[2] At Ajmer, the mausoleum of the illustrious saint Chisti maintained on its endowments about 1,100 Pirzadas, while its income from the "munificence of pilgrims flocking from different places" was quite substantial. When princes and great men visited the place, there was feasting and rejoicing for many days. Their donations were the chief amusements of these Pirzadas. The Tuburrook (*Prasad*) was "afterwards sold by the Pirzadas about the town, and anxiously purchased by the pious and devout". Broughton informs us thatMahadaji Scindhia's devotion to Muslim saints, especially to Chisti, and even to Muslim religious customs was profound and that he "has given this favourite entertainment three times since our arrival; he has also bestowed a superb pall and canopy of cloth of gold upon the tomb; and even the Pirzadas seem to be pretty well satisfied with his pecuniary donations". Nautch-girls were employed to sing before the tomb and on Thursday night the dancing girls in the city were summoned to amuse the devotees flocking in large numbers.[3] Veneration for saints was above all distinctions of caste or creed. Mahadaji is also reported to have been devoted to one Bala Cadir, a Muslim Fakir, and to have granted him a large *Jagir* in Deccan.[4]

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 41.
[2] *Ibid.*, *I*, pp. 82-83; *II*, pp. 28, 65. [3] Broughton: *Letters*, pp. 254-57.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 239-40. The saint is spoken to have predicted Scindhia's rise at a time when there was "no rationals ground for such a prophecy."

In connection with saint-worship, Capt. Franklin reports the existence of a sect of "Muslim, Hindus" about 1500 in number principally in Bundelkhand, but also spread in other parts. Pannah was their chief religious establishment. The founder—Ji Saheb, —had declared himself "the promised Imam Mehdi" and Raja Chatrasal "afforded him protection from Muslim persecution". The sect admitted people from all religions, had a temple of "very respectable edifice" and the object of worship was the shrine of the saint. Here is a description of it:

"On the top of the tomb was placed the figure of a human head. The brow or frontal aspect of these was marked like the Vaishnaiva Hindus, with three streaks uniting between the eyebrows, and on the crown was placed something like three fingers, probably in imitation of the streaks on the forehead."[1]

The report of this sect appears to be inaccurate, but it is not difficult to see that saint worship was very popular, and it is highly probable that some sects grew up after Muslim saints and Hindus voluntarily joined them. In the history of the expansion of Islam in India, the Muslim saints have played a very decisive role, and they also succeeded in bridging the gulf between the two great religions. The sects associated with Guru Nanak and Kabir were also aiming at eliminating the communal differences which religion countenanced, and had succeeded in claiming many followers within their fold. Buchanan mentions that even in Bengal at the end of the 18th century the followers of Nanak were most numerous.[2] In Bihar and Uttar Pradesh the Kabirpanthis are mentioned as constituting a prominent sect.[3] About Bihar, he cites the name of a new sect founded in the later part of the 18th century to unite the Hindus and Muslims in uniform symphony of faith. In the district of Shahabad, a Muslim tailor assumed the name of Daria Das and established "a new route to heaven". He admitted the Hindus into it and in the first decade of the 19th century, his followers counted about 20,000. The sect was entirely catholic in organization accommodating both Hindu and Muslim religious practices. What is noteworthy about it is that the founder rejected the Prophet, and the worship of God was the only legal

[1] Coleman: *Mythology of the Hindoos*, pp. 310-12.
[2] Martin: *op. cit., III*, p. 167. [3] *Ibid., I*, p. 198; *II*, pp. 488-90.

form of worship. The monotheistic character of the sect was reinforced by banning all forms of image worship. The members of the priestly organization, both Hindus and Muslims, "ate in common" and accepted food from any one of the laity. They, of course, rejected the food of the "heretics". Animal life was considered by them as a part of the supreme deity and was altogether excluded from dietary. Of the three priests who gave the account of the sect to Buchanan, one was a Rajput, another a Kayastha, and the third a Kurmi.[1]

Just as the Hindus bowed low before the shrines and feet of the Muslim saints, so also the Muslim masses made offerings before the idols of the Hindu gods. Though Islam upheld monotheism, yet in India it was very much influenced by the polytheistic elements of Hindu religion. The various elements of Nature like the Sun and Moon were objects of worship by the Muslims also.[2] About the Company's northern territories Buchanan writes:

> "Not only the converts, but even many Mussulmans of rank and foreign extraction are tinged with the Hindu superstitions, chiefly, as usual, owing to the fears of the women, who in cases of danger cannot be prevented from making offerings to the objects of Hindu devotion, when application to their own saints have failed; and the Hindus, in their turn, are equally willing to respect the saints of the Muhammedan faith."[3]

In Bengal, the worship of Kali was popualr with Muslims and even in villages inhabited wholly by them, there were distinct places of worship for this deity.[4] Belief in objects of worship held by Hindus was also shared by their religious classes, the Kazis Mollas, Fakirs, for instance. If they did not make offerings with their

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 499-501.

[2] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 482, 486-87. Forbes: *op. cit. I*, p. 471.

[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 446, also *I*, p. 141.
From a sanad of His Highness Malhar Rao in 1740 to one Murad Fakir, we learn how Muslim Fakirs even supervised the worship of village godlings. Before the Maratha rule, this Fakir worshipped Shri Muranti Khedapati—the village god. Later he was granted house and land for maintenance and a Hindu mendicant was appointed to take charge of the worship of the deity. *Proceedings Indian Historical Records Commission XIII*, December 1930, p. 143.

[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*. p. 749.

own hands, they had them presented on their behalf through proper hands.[1] In Bengal, the religious outlook and practices of the Hindus and Muslims were very much influenced by one another. We learn that Mir Jafar on his deathbed was persuaded by Nand Kumar to sip some drops of water "that had been poured in libation over the idol at Kiriteshwari (a famous temple at Murshidabed)".[2] It was customary for the Muslims to offer *Puja* in Hindu temples, and the Hindus *Sinni* at mosques. The Brahmans are mentioned as consulting the Qoran, and Muslims seeking the benedictions of the *Sapta-Rishis*, the illustrious seven sages of the Hindus.[3] In contemporary Bengal in the writings of Muslim poets, we find Muslims represented as praying to the god Siva, and we come across the following hymn addressed to Saraswati, the goddess of learning:

*Hail O Saraswati, thou art my mother*
*Thy helpless child invokes thee: Will thou not hear?*[4]

This mutual adoption and assimilation of the religious practices led to the worship of the common deity "Satya Pir" which was very popular. Both the Hindus and Muslims sung hymns in Bengali in his praise, and Brahmans and *Sudras* alike made offerings of sweetmeats.[5] In a poem of Bharatchandra, a contemporary Bengal poet, Sadananda, a Hindu merchant, gets a daughter by invoking this popular object of worship. But he incurred its wrath as he forgot to make the promised offerings, with the result that his son-in-law met with a premature death. The evolution of the worship of this common deity was the high watermark of spiritual kinship between Hinduism and Islam in this country of universal toleration.

Elements of anthropomorphism, which Islam inculcated in the Indian environment, also bear eloquent testimony to the influence of popular Hinduism over the orthodoxy of the sister religion. The various innovations Badshah Begum introduced in the religious life of the palace at Lucknow reveal the tremendous modification that the Islam went in this country. Tombs were erected in memory of the eleven *Imams*, and prayers offered beside

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit., III*, p. 512. [2] *Seir-Mutaqherin, II*, p. 558.
[3] Sen: *History of Bengali Language and Literature*, pp. 703-06.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 798. [5] Granthavali: *op. cit.*, p. i·

them. Handsome Syed girls were brought to the palace and named as the wives of *Imams*. "Each one bore the name of wife of one of the Imams out of eleven." They were named *Achooti* and the Begum every morning getting up from the bed caught "a sight of their face first as a happy omen".[1] After the custom of *Devadasis*, the Begum did not permit them to marry and asked them to dedicate their life to the cause of religion.[2] From Ali, we learn that "the Tazia . . . graces the houses of all good Mussulmans in India, who are not of the sect called Soonies. This model of their Emaum's tomb is an object of profound respect".[3] These religious practices of the Muslims were a part of the psychological transformation which Islam underwent under the dominating influence of Hinduism.

The regard shown by Hindus towards Muslim customs and the adoption by the Muslims of the Hindu customs, was most manifest in their common celebration of the important religious festivals. Remarking on it Broughton says: "It is notorious, indeed, that the Moohumedans of India have deviated so widely from the institutions of their forefathers, and have adopted so many of the customs and prejudices of the Hindoos, that they form almost a distinct class from their brethren in other parts of the world."[4] During the Mohurrum festival, we learn that in territories governed by Mahadaji, the Hindus including the Marathas joined with the Muslims in the ceremonies: "Every one turns Fuqeer, that is he wears some green rags; with a string of green and red cotton yarn, tied up like beads, across his shoulders; and goes about begging from such of his acquaintances as are foolish enough to give him anything." Broughton writes that Mahadaji himself "is a Fuqeer during the whole of the Moohurram". "At the Durbar the other day he was dressed entirely in green, the mourning of the Moosulmans, with no other ornament than eight or nine strings of beautiful emeralds round

[1] *Tarikh Badshah Begum*, pp. 6-7.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-9.
[3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 48.
The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* also mentions that the popular religion of Shias in South was betraying leanings towards Imam worship and saint worship. *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 10-11, 32.
[4] Broughton: *op. cit.*, p. 205.

his neck. In this garb, accompanied by a few of his confidential servants, he roams about at night, and visits the different Taziyas throughout the camp."[1] Even the Sirdars, principally those who were non-Brahmans, "frequently construct Taziyas at their own tents, and expend large sums of money upon them".[2] This spirit of co-operation prevailed in Bengal in a marked manner and the Hindus of higher strata contributed towards "the pageant in honour of the grandsons of Muhammad" and entertained others with sweet drinks, etc.[3] During the days of Mohurrum, the Hindus suspended their entertainments and shared the mourning of their Muslim brethren.[4]

So far as the festival of Holi is concerned, it was almost a national festival celebrated by all classes of people throughout India. Its days were the "season of universal merriment and joy".[5] The spring festival of Basant was another, and at Lucknow the people and the Muslim court celebrated it, all clad in yellow clothes, while the King held a public banquet and organized amusements on a grand scale.[6]

Among many superstitions that prevailed it was difficult to draw a dividing line among the masses of different faiths. People had similar beliefs in witchcraft and magic, in worship of evil spirits and dread of ghosts. They wore amulets and talismans and consulted astrologers. If we include these things in religion, then certainly the Hindus and Muslims, particularly of the lower strata of society, were the members of one common religious fraternity defying all creedal exclusiveness.

## *Tendencies in Popular Religion*

It is futile to refer at length to the structure of popular religion and popular forms of worship as religious practices were different from class to class and region to region. The worship of the upper strata was pure, meditative and artistic, of the lower dominated by primitive rites and ritualism. The conditions of the religious life of the masses were not materially

[1] Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 144.
[4] Broughton: *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 69.
[6] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 287-88.

different from those of our own times.[1] It is, however, interesting to study that certain tendencies which appear working actively in the religious life of society in the 19th century were also operative during the period under study. A critical study of the trends of popular worship bears out that the silent missionary enterprise of Hinduism in incorporating animistic objects of worship, spirits and heroes peculiar to different tribes was energetically proceeding. The "official creed" of Hinduism, William Crooke truly states, "has always been characterized by extreme catholicism and receptivity".[2]

In Northern India, the objects of worship originally confined to particular castes, tribes, or localities were getting popular with all sections of the population. The heroes and deified spirits of the lower castes were being invoked at marriages and social ceremonies by people of the higher castes and these were also being classified with gods and goddesses of the orthodox cults. It is mentioned that the Brahman priestly order, too, was taking pains to multiply their *Gram-devtas*.[3] A study of the *Gram-devtas* in the North reveals the extent of cultural reclamation religion was performing in the country. In the district of Patna, Buchanan observed that the worship of ghosts of the heroes and saints of low tribes was very common. The priests of the Dhanuk tribe, who supervised this worship, were securing respectable recognition as *Pretiya Brahmans*.[4] Gurriya was the "most celebrated object of worship", a hero claimed by Goalas as of their caste. The other rural gods were likewise the deified beings of the different lower tribes. Songs were composed and recited in their praise and their influence over society was gradually extending to all sections of the Hindu population.[5] The following is a list of the objects of worship in the district of Bhagalpur:

Kali was the popular deity of Brahmans where there were others for special occasions like Bisheshwari, Siddeshwari, Chandi,

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 115-17. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 429, 422-27. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 42; *II*, pp. 133-34. Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. LXXV-LXXVI. Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, po. 749-50. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 84-5.

[2] Crooke: *Introduction to Popular Religion and Folk-lore of Northern India*, see preface.

[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 192-94; *II*, 130-33, 478-79; *III*, pp. 168-69.

[4] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 166. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 192-94.

Mahamaya, Sitala, Makeswari elsewhere. Siva was also worshipped as Kanggalo, Burhanatha, Gauri Shankar, Bangkanatha in different localities. In the extensive locality of Kharakpur. Dube-bhayharan was a common village deity. He is mentioned as a Brahman of the ancient legends who ripped up his own belly at being molested by a Kshattriya Raja, and became a devil and "ever since a terror to the whole country". Pachuya was a male devil destroying children. Ram Keyari and Mahadano, deified heroes of rude tribes, were worshipped. Bisurawat, a holy man of the Goala caste; Chamufoujdar, a holy man of the Tiwar caste; Chaldeo, a god of the Malers; Nilmata, a goddess of several primitive tribes, Hari Ojha, a male saint; and Ratnamohan, a Zemindar Brahman killed by a tiger and became a devil, chiefly invoked at marriages, were all popular objects of worship. Kokil Chandra, a devil, was addressed at harvest. He was, according to some, a potter, to others a milkman and was supposed to have been killed by a tiger and was now a terror to the neighbourhood. His votaries included Brahmans and others. Sivaram Thakur, Ram Thakur, Ajan Singh, Kamalnaiya, Vindhyavasini (feminine), Rakshasi, Sikharavasini, Bajun—females—and a host of others have been mentioned as objects of worship by the credulous people.[1]

In the rural areas of Dinajpur, Bengal, the destructive female spirits worshipped as *Saktis* were multiplying and the village gods, objects of worship of lower tribes, were getting popular with the higher strata. Most of the deities like Bishhori, the goddess of reptiles, Siddeshwari, Vriddeshwari, Mangal Chandi were considered even by the Brahmans "as the same with the wife of Sib". At the temples dedicated to most of the *Gram-devtas* we find Brahmans officiating as priests.[2] Dehavaruni was the goddess peculiar to the district of Purneah. She freed her votaries from the trouble of transmigration and carried them "direct to a place exempt from the miseries of change".[3] In Nepal and Mithila, Bhimsen was the most popular object of worship. The Rajputs and the high *Sudra* castes are mentioned as especially enamoured of him "and songs concerning him are in every one's mouth".[4] According to Buchanan, the rural

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 132-33.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 168.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 748-49.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 169.

gods and deities were all originally tribal objects of worship assimilated within the structure of popular Hinduism.[1]

Even in South India, where the rigidity of caste was most pronounced, Hindu religion was liberally reclaiming most of the male gods and deified spirits of the lower tribes. These were simply taking their place along with Siva and Kali as their different manifestations.[2] The *Munis*, the male evil spirits of the low tribes in the Carnatic, were gradually growing popular with all sections of society.[3] The worship of the evil spirits of the forests was becoming popular with people of the plains in the Carnatic and Malabar provinces. Snake-worship, fish-worship, etc., originally confined to the hilly regions, were now being assimilated into popular religion in the plains.[4] The participation of the Brahmans in the rites of the lower castes, too, was fast increasing and Buchanan writes that in sickness and distress, they "invoke with fear and trembling the power of the Bhairov, and of the female saktis, who were formerly, perhaps, considered by natives as the malignant spirits of the woods, mountains, and rivers".[5] In his *Rambles and Recollections*, Sleeman dealing with a local godling in the North, Rae Sinh, remarks: "This is the way gods were made all over the world and are now made in India."[6] Tod also gives a similar picture of the male and female objects of worship in Rajputana. Mata-Janavi, the mother of births, was something like "Juno-lucina" with the Rajputs. Bhuki-mata was the deity of drought and hunger with a pale starving appearance. Mamadevi, the mother of the gods, had the honour of being worshipped in lofty temples domineering over a host of minor divinities.[7]

This explains the varied range of popular worship, and the structure of polytheism was getting unwieldy because the objects of worship belonging to particular castes or tribes were still on their way to the higher celestial world to take their seat along with the great gods of immemorial antiquity.[8] As such, it is not

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 557.
[2] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 242, 304, 388, 334-35; *II*, pp. 25, 59, 64, 214; *III*, pp. 53, 78, 92, 142, 188. [3] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 168.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 647-52. [5] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *III*, 168-69.
[6] Sleeman: *Rambles and Reflections*, *I*, p. 123.
[7] Tod: *The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*, *I*, pp. 378, 708; *II*, pp. 353, 670, 763. [8] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 190; *II*, p. 749.

surprising if the Europeans in the 18th century reckoned the gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon at even more than thirty-three crores.[1]

Some of the European writings, particularly the missionary accounts, have pronounced the most severe indictment on the religious life of the people. Grant, a Director of the Company's Court, compiled a laborious essay in 1782 containing prejudiced remarks on the Indian people and their character. He attributed their degeneration to the following factors —climate, despotic form of Indian governments, social laws of caste, family, inheritance and, above all, religion. According to him, the Hindu tenets relating to ceremonial and pecuniary atonements, transmigration, the character of their deities and modes of worship, and superstitious beliefs and practices were making incalculable mischief on the morals of the people.[2] According to Henry Martyn, the cymbals and drums of a Hindu temple were the sounds of the devil and the temple walls "the neighbourhood of hell".[3] The Qoran, to him, "with its mock majesty and paltry precepts", was despicable to those "who can read the word of God".[4] The tone of the preaching of Ward, Brown, etc., was this: "All your gods are nothing else but demons; you will go to hell to expiate in eternal flames the crime of your idolatry."[5] Duff held the view that people of India had no claim to civilization because they were "sunk into the depths of a demoralization which has become endemic and universal, manifested in aggravated forms and perpetuated from age to age, as if engraven with a pen of iron upon their character".[6] These missionaries were also responsible for circulating gross accounts abroad about the Car Festival at the temple of Jagannath, the Moloch of the East, and other religious practices of the Hindus.[7]

Making every allowance for the exaggerations in the European accounts, it is, however, difficult to deny that religious life of

[1] Forbes, *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 126. Ward: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xxiv.
[2] *Parliamentary Papers*, *1812-13*, *X*, pp. 42-60.
[3] Smith: *Life of Henry Martyn*, p. 163.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 217. Wilberforce: *Journals of Martyn*, p. 32.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[6] Duff: *India and Indian Missions*, pp. 39-40. [7] *Ibid.*, pp. 197-98.

the people required reformation. The religion professed by the masses was a compound of magic, animism and superstition. By the upper strata, too, it was degenerated into a ceremonious ritualism. Those who revered the philosophical doctrines and followed the rational path formed "but a very small part of the Hindoo population".[1] There is much truth in the remark of Ward that the system of idolatry was not calculated to effect the moral regeneration of the people but promoted corruption of manners and the frauds of the priestly community.[2] The conceptions of primary elements—fire, air, water, earth and space, of celestial, aerial and other elements of Nature, of "the primeval energy" pervading the universe, on which religion sought to enlighten the people—were clouded under the crest of idolatry and idols themselves had become objects of worship.[3] As Forbes says:

> "In the fertile imagination of the Indian all nature is animated by an endless number and infinite variety of inferior deities and benevolent spirits who occupy every grove, preside over every fountain, and fill the heavens and the earth with forms invisible to mortal eyes."[4]

The distance that society encouraged between the higher and lower groups prevented the swift cultural regeneration of the people as a whole. The religion of the lower type in its ultimate analysis was a system of glorified superstition. Buchanan writes how in Bihar and the eastern Uttar Pradesh, where pure Vaishnavism inspired the upper classes of Hindus, the lower classes gloried animal sacrifices in the worship of their deities and devils.[5] The cruel rites of devil worship of the low castes in South India, the tortures of Chidi-mari, a festival in honour of the goddess Mariamma, and the ceremony of hook-swinging in Bengal strike the mind with painful sensations.[6] Commenting on them, Dubois remarks that the Hindus were accustomed "to carry everything to extremes" and that many of their rites were impregnated with "unconscionable depravity".[7] In Bengal,

[1] Ward: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xii. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. xLvii-Lx. [3] *Ibid.*, pp. xiv-xxiv.
[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 238.
[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 207-08; *II*, pp. 496, 742.
[6] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 421-23. Stavorinus; *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 425-26. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 604-18. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 290.

Tantric influences and Sakti-puja stained religious life with animal sacrifice and eroticism, the priest standing "before the altar of his idol, with his hands reeking with the blood of his newly slaughtered victim".[1] It was a popular belief that the Saktis could only be appeased by blood; the Durga Puja festival was necessarily accompanied by buffalo sacrifices.[2] The goddess Bhavani at Dasahra, says Craufurd, had to be appeased by the blood of the same animal.[3] The deity called Chamoondie, seated in the famous temple on the hills of Mysore, frequently represented with a necklace of human skulls, says Wilks, delighted in blood.[4] Among certain sects influenced by Tantrism, both in the South and North, worship is mentioned as accompanied by secret nocturnal ceremonies and Bachanalian orgies—eating and drinking everything, men and women huddled together and shamelessly violating the laws of decency. According to Dubois, Namadharis were "the most frequent perpetrators of these disgusting sacrifices", that they took all sorts of flesh and intoxicants though they treated Brahmans and Pariahs alike.[5] Buchanan mentions that the members of the sect of Virbhav and of monastic orders of Kanphata yogis and Aghorpanthis in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal followed Tantric principles and indulged in erotic practices. Their worship was, however, performed in secrecy and their number was inconsiderable and they were not viewed with favour by others.[6] The outer world believed that their worship was accompanied by five offerings: wine, flesh, *Mudra* (parched grain) and *Maithun* (women). "The offering is made to the deity, but as usual the votary enjoys the things that have been offered."[7]

Society's religiosity also encouraged the abuse of the ascetic ideals. In the upper strata, the attainment of divine wisdom through renunciation of the world and practice of severe austerities was practised almost by the very few. They were guided by the example of Janaka: "A man does not become a hermit who even in his own house subdues his passions."[8] These

[1] *Selections Calcutta Gazette*, *III*, p. 439.
[2] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 422-23. Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 556.
[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 183. [4] Wilks: *op. cit.*, p. 34, footnote.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 288-90.
[6] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 152; *II*, pp. 492, 494, 732: *III*, 166-67.
[7] *Ibid.*, *III*. pp. 523-24.
[8] Ward: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. ix-x. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 130.

were mostly the people of the lower classes who crowded the ranks of the ascetic sects and, as Dubois says, assumed "the cloak of religion" and practised begging as a profession.[1]

Some accounts emphasize that worship even in the temples of higher gods was corrupt and debasing. The system of Devadasis or priestesses attached to the temples of South India, their sets of dancing girls, and their voluptuous adornments certainly were not a healthy edifying feature.[2] Hindu worship in these temples was also very expensive and in sharp contrast to the prayers of Muslims in their mosques in calm beatitude.[3] It is, however, gratifying that religious life in Gujarat dominated by Jainism was quite pure,[4] and worship in the temples of Northern India, too, was free from lasciviousness. An Englishman serving in Bengal observes: "Of the nature of the disgusting vices practised before these idols, I am entirely ignorant, for though I have visited many temples of celebrity, in Bengal, Benaras, Mathura, Kannauj and Hardwar, and a hundred places besides, yet I have never witnessed any exhibition at their shrines that bore the appearance of indecency."[5]

In the end, the degenerate character of the priestly community, too, requires to be emphasized, which was in no small measure due to the strong influence the priest wielded over society. In this connection Robert Orme says that "the influence of priestcraft over superstition is nowhere so visible as in India".[6] In many sects, the spiritual guides, irrespective of their religious merits, had themselves become "the objects of worship".[7] Moreover, almost everywhere, along the course of rivers and rivulets could be seen idols of stones representing some local gods or deities and some priests were ever ready there "to receive the oblations from pilgrims eager to seek some blessings through their help". At Gaya, Buchanan observed the low conduct of the priests and their fondness for money. "I stood some time near Pretsila, the rock of the ghost", says he,

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 114.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 590-603. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 185-87, 290. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 12-13; *II*, pp. 266, 276, 308; *III*, p. 174. [3] *Ibid.*
[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 131.
[5] *Asiatic Annual Register 1806—Characters*. p. 47. [6] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 432.
[7] Ward: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. Lxv; Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 41.
*Asiatic Annual Register 1806*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 6.

"in silent commiseration of human imbecility, which here is in a most disgusting form".[1] The records of the Maratha governments also throw light on the degeneration of the priestly community. At Varanasi, where Brahman priests of all sub-castes had congregated in large numbers without material means of livelihood, their corruption was alarming. A letter of Mahipat Rao written to Peshwa Madhav Rao dated July 20, 1772, describes how the priests were obdurate in their heavy demands on the pilgrims and gave them great trouble. In his letters he gives an account of the harassment of pilgrims by the Gavalis and Gangaputras, the Pandas of Prayag, who were, and still are, notorious for their exactions. Vices and hypocrisy were rampant among them at all these reputed centres of religion.[2]

From what we have stated before, it is not difficult to appreciate that the need for reform in religion was necessary. The degenerate forms of idol-worship, the primitive rites of the lower strata, and various other considerations inspired a movement of reform even in the 18th century. We find new reformist sects springing up in different parts of the country.

A distinctive feature of these sects was that they were founded by people of non-Brahman castes and many by people of quite low castes. In their organisation and principles they appear as charters of revolt against the control of religion by the Brahman priests. They also aimed at reforming the religious life and practices of the lower strata in particular. The founder of the Satyanami sect in Uttar Pradesh was Dulandas, a Rajput of Kotawa near the town of Bahraich. At the time of Buchanan's visit, his grandson, by name Jalalidas, was the chief priest of the sect. It was open to all castes and even Muslims and the designation of the chief priest bears a Muslim nomenclature.[3] The sect of Sivanarayan was founded by another Rajput of Sesana, three or four days' journey west from Gorakhpur. This sect was quite popular with the Rajputs at Varanasi. It is emphasized that the founder wrote several

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 65.

[2] *Proceedings:* Indian Historical Records Commission, *XIV*, pp. 67-8. He informs us how a Panda of Varanasi offered to take his Muslim students around Hindu sacred places provided they were dressed as Hindus.

[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 490-91.

books such as *Sant-bilas*, *Sant-upadesh*, *Sant-sunder*, *Sant-sagar*, etc., for the guidance of his followers called *Santas*.[1] Munnadas, a goldsmith, was the founder of the sect of Apapanthis in Oudh.[2] The province of Bengal, too, was quite fertile in respect of the growth of new sects. The sect of Katra-Bhajas, founded by an ascetic of obscure origin in the district of Nadia, was quite popular and all his disciples were of low castes. At the death of the founder in 1769, the sect claimed a large membership. It recognized no caste or communal distinctions and its various festivals were open to both Hindus and Muslims.[3] The founder of the sect of Balaramis is mentioned as a Hari, a very low caste. On his death, his widow, a woman of great intelligence and character, succeeded to the headship of the sect. No caste distinctions were recognized within the sect and all its members met and ate together.[4] In the Central Province, in the Chhattisgarh division, we learn of one Ghasi Das of the caste of Chamar, who endeavoured to raise the status of his people by reviving the Satnami sect, originally founded in the 15th century by Rai Das, a disciple of Ramananda. He preached that there is only one God, "the Satnam", and that all men being of the same clay are equal.[5] Similar sects arose in other parts of the country. The founders themselves were ultimately deified as incarnations, which not only suggests the success of their mission but also the tremendous possibilities of religion for the reclamation of the lower classes in society.

Most of these reform or revivalist sects of the period condemned the idolatry and ritualism of popular Hinduism. They drew their inspiration primarily from pure Vaishnavism, preached simple worship of God and enjoined moral life as an essential part of good religious life. About the Charan Dasis, a sect founded about 1758, popular with Vaisyas at Delhi, Wilson writes that they differed from other Vaishnavites in so far as they did not worship their deity through any concrete idol representation and excluded "even the Tulsi plant and Salagram from

[1] Martin: *op. cit., II.* p. 137. [2] Bose: *Hindu Civilization, I*, p. 115.

[3] Hunter: *Statistical Account of Bengal, Nadiya and Jessore, II.* He describes the details of the various legends connected with the birth of the founder, and the miracles attributed to him. [4] Bose: *op. cit., I*, p. 116.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 117-19.

their devotions." They attached supreme importance to morality and did not acknowledge faith to be independent of actions. Their code of morality emphasized ten prohibitions: not to lie, not to revile, not to speak hastily, not to discourse idly, not to steal, not to commit adultery, not to offer violence to any created being, not to imagine evil, not to cherish hatred, and not to indulge in conceit or pride.[1] The Satyanamis of Uttar Pradesh were distinguished by "a black and white string, tied round the wrist, and a bracelet of beads, made of the Karma wood." In greeting each other they used the words *Satyanam.* Abstinence from worldly enjoyments and practice of Yoga were considered acts of merit for the attainment of bliss.[2] The Sivanarayans believed that the pious ones could go to *Sant-deva*—the abode of the pious—only by virtue of good actions.[3] The Karta-Bhajas of Bengal were likewise attached to the ten commandments of their founder whom they considered an incarnation of Vishnu. These were: Do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not kill, have no adulterous thought, do not wish for another's property, wish not to kill, tell no untruth, use no bad language, talk not meaninglessly, talk not uselessly. All of these sects preached the unity of godhead and equality of men. According to them, idol worship was false, and the use of things like meat, liquor, etc., was a moral offence. Their indignation against control of religion by the Brahman priests was accompanied by a crusade on idolatry and glorification of pure devotion, and good life.

Some of the new sects of the period made a bold attempt at a synthesis between Hinduism and Islam and aimed at harmonizing the two great faiths of the country. We have mentioned how the sect of Satyanamis founded by a Hindu was open to both Hindus and Muslims, and the works of the founder were read as Scriptures by the members. The Katra-Bhajas likewise made no communal distinctions. In the district of Sahabad, we have already noted how a Muslim tailor founded a new monotheistic sect, non-communal in organization. Though all these sects were based on excessive adoration of the founders, they aimed at reforming the religious life of peo-

[1] Wilson: *Religious Sects of the Hindus*, p. 179.
[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 490-91.  [3] *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.

ple. Montgomery Martin, the editor of Buchanan's journals, comments on them:

"Indeed, of late years, sectarianism has spread itself in India, particularly among the once orthodox Hindus, not a few of whom are passing from the grossest idolatry into the abstract non-entities of deism."

He fondly hoped that in course of time "the idols of Pagans will gradually be broken, and the ground prepared for the pure seeds of Christian principles".[1] The new sects of the period, were, however, founded at places where Christianity had not influenced life in society. They testify to the movement of reform manifesting in society even independently of foreign influences. Of religious experiments and reforms, India has ever been a fertile field, and the period under review was not barren of creative activity in this sphere.

## *Influence of Religion on Indian Character*

It is interesting to study the formative influences of religion on the life and character of the individual. The European accounts throw ample light on the subject. It would, however, be a mistake to suppose that religion had succeeded in evolving anything like a uniform pattern of character. It could not completely counteract the influences of climate, geography, or history varying in different regions. Forster speaks about "the ostensible dissimilarity" in the manners of people in different provinces.[2] Robert Orme has also emphasized how it is not wise to expect "that there should be no exception to one general assertion of the character of the inhabitants."[3] Religion was, however, influencing the life of the individual in many ways and was primarily responsible for shaping the salient features of his character.

Every religion emphasised certain acts of merit, the fulfilment of which implied distinction in society. Ward mentions the chief ones enjoined by Hinduism and acted upon by people, viz., performance of religious ceremonies, ablutions, fasting, gifts and charities to Brahmans, hospitality to travellers, construction of

[1] Martin: *op. cit., I*, p. 501, footnote. [2] Forster: *op. cit. I*, p. xii.
[3] Orme: *op. cit., I*, p. 6.

public works like pools, roads, plantations for pilgrims, readings and rehearsals from sacred books, pilgrimages to sacred places, performance of the ceremonies of *Shradh* for the happiness of ancestors.[1] Of course, the old *Varnashram Dharma* was honoured only in its breach and the philosophical doctrines were the consolation of the intelligentsia only.[2] But there is no doubt that the social charity of the Hindus was directed on above lines —building public rest-houses, *Dharmshalas*, constructing wells, and temples. The foreigners have mentioned the conveniences of travelling in India. Even in villages there were rest-houses maintained at public expense.[3] It is mentioned that the well-to-do Hindus "assisted the poor to undertake pilgrimages to celebrated temples,[4] and Robert Orme says that they believed "that acts of charity to the poor can atone for all their sins".[5] During the period we find that the great centres of pilgrimage like Hardwar, Mathura, Brindaban, Ujjain, Varanasi, Allahabad, Gaya, Jagannatha, Tripuri, Srirangham, etc., were the Mecca of Hindus to which hundreds of thousands went from different parts of the country. At these places, Hinduism shone forth in all its glory. Inside the temples and at the banks of the sacred rivers people of different classes were inspired by a higher communion of spirit and devotion.[6] Varanasi was veritably the cultural fortress of Hinduism. Twining writes that at Varanasi more than 100,000 assembled within the sanctified limits of the city during the principal festivals.[7] A member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, who toured in the central parts of India, reports:

> "The annual resort of devout pilgrims, from all parts of the Deccan, and especially from the Maratha territories to Benaras, Allahabad and Gaya, is great. Large caravans of pilgrims with covered litters carrying ladies of respectable families with others riding on ponies used to proceed from Poona towards

1 Ward: *op. cit., I*, pp. LXV-LXXX.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. IX-X. also Martin: *op. cit., II*, pp. 752-53.

3 *Asiatic Annual Register for 1799*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 144.

4 Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit., I*, p. 428.

5 Orme: *op. cit.*. pp. 430-31.

6 Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 96. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 70. Hodges: *Travels*, p. 94. Martin: *op. cit., I*, pp. 53, 194.

7 Twining: *Travels*, pp. 330-31.

Benaras and were joined by other batches of pilgrims from the roadside stations."[1]

So great was the spell of the holy waters of the Ganga that its banks drew devoted pilgrims in thousands from different corners. The Dutch Admiral reports how people from Bengal, Orissa, Golcunda, Coromandal and other parts eagerly rushed to Hugli and Triveni for a dip into the Ganga "to cleanse both their bodies and their souls" and that the concourse for days together used to be "incredible". For the benefit of their relations, the pilgrims carried the holy water and it is mentioned that the water was also sold at distant places, the price bearing a proportion to the distance from the river.[2] Every pious Hindu wished to breathe his last within the precincts of Varanasi and many old and invalids proceeded to the place "for the sake of ending their days. . . ."[3] Islam also enjoined on its followers the ideals of *Zukaat*, of alms, and Ali says that the Muslims generally expended a large portion of their annual income on charitable donations.[4] The classes entitled to charity were poor pilgrims, *Fakirs*, beggars and insolvent debtors, champions of religion and proselytes to the faith.[5] Fasting was construed as a chief act of merit and it was a powerful influence on the Muslim mind, besides faith in prayers, efficacy of pilgrimages to Mecca, etc.[6] The Parsis, the noted worshippers of the Sun and Fire, are mentioned as "spiritualists", inclined towards virtue and perception of right and wrong.[7] The main injunctions of Zoroaster were understood to be to pardon injuries, to honour parents and the king, to respect old age, and to practise universal benevolence. Fasting and celibacy were, however, forbidden to the individual.[8]

There is no doubt that religious influence was promoting the charitable disposition of people; charity and hospitality are emphasized as prominent traits of Indian character. Robert

[1] *Asiatic Annual Register for 1806*, Miscellaneous Tracts, pp. 14, 22.

[2] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 404-05. He mentions that pilgrims carried the Ganga water in large flasks "suspended at either end of a bamboo, which rests upon the shoulder". *Ibid.*, p. 405, footnote.

[3] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 154.

[4] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 252. also *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 57-9.

[5] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 59-60.

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 60-82.

[7] Grose: *op. cit. I*, pp. 212-22

[8] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 81.

Orme admits that Hindus "are charitable, even to relieving the necessities of strangers", and that they possessed "humane and gentle manners".[1] Forbes says that their social charity, building tanks, wells, plantations on high roads, etc., was "everywhere inculcated" "and it is equally the ambition of a south Malabari as of a northern Hindoo to have a tank, a well, choultrie called after his name".[2] He also says how religion fostered "mild, affectionate, kind, humane temperament" among Hindus.[3] Craufurd emphasizes that "their rules of morality are most benevolent; and hospitality and charity are not only strongly inculcated but I believe nowhere more universally practised than amongst Hindoos".[4] According to Dubois, justice, humanity, honesty, compassion, and disinterestedness were the virtues or precepts of morality emphasized by Hinduism.[5] Abbe de Guyon says that these were practised and that there was no radical change in the Hindu character as mentioned in ancient accounts. Love of virtue, sincerity, order, peace and temperance constituted the character of Indians. By virtue, they understood "a certain greatness of soul which despises dangers and death, and has glory only for its object; which tramples under foot ease and the pleasures of life; which seeks after the esteem and admiration of mankind".[6]

European accounts also emphasize that certain tenets of Hindus, their doctrines of metempsychosis, belief in the immortality of soul, in the future state of rewards and punishments were influencing their character.[7] They have noted how their belief in metempsychosis made them solicitous of animal life. They detest cruelty and shedding of blood. "They shed no blood and eat no flesh", says Orme, "because they believe in the transmigration of souls".[8] They respected the life of innocent animals like bees, ants, monkeys, and, in particular, the cow. And all these were invested with the sentiment:

[1] Orme: *op. cit.*, pp. 430-31. [2] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 239.
[3] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 143. [4] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 147.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 515. [6] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*,. p. 53.
[7] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 112. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 147. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 485-86. Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 280. Martin: *op. cit. II*, p. 750.
[8] Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 3, also Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 143.

*The smallest beetle that we tread upon,*
*In corporal suffering feels a pang as great*
*As when a giant dies.*[1]

For the cow they had a very tender heart, as it was not only innocent but "very serviceable to mankind", "both in agriculture" and giving "a good diet, as milk, butter and cheese".[2] In the territories under Hindu princes, particularly on the Malabar coast, "they do not suffer the open killing of cows".[3]

On the western side in Gujarat and further South, the Brahmans and *Vaisyas* are described as abstaining from all animal food, owing to their respect for animal life. Those who belonged to the fighting professions, Rajputs, etc., had to violate "the principles of universal humanity, mildness, and charity for their profession of arms".[4] The influence of Jainism which was popular with the *Vaisya* castes, and was strong in the south-west, certainly promoted respect for animal life among other classes also.[5] In this respect the Baniyas were very strict. About the middle of the century, at Cambay they maintained three hospitals, one for birds, another for goats, and a third for black cattle. "No cow, or calf, could be killed in the city and they had obtained a decree to that effect from the Mughals." It is said that they did not eat anything "that is red, for fear there should be blood in it".[6] At Surat, they maintained another hospital, "a most remarkable institution", for the accommodation of animals which in sickness were "bathed with the tenderest care".[7] They avoided "the murder of the meanest insect". Several of them were seen wearing a piece of thin linen or gauzes before their mouths that they did not deprive any creature of life by their breath. Others would sweep the dust of the ground before treading it.[8]

In the 18th century, religion and society had come so close that social ideals and practices themselves were considered sacred. To all appearance there was an irrevocable identity between religion and social arrangements of caste, family,

[1] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, pp. 45, 524-25. [2] Grose: *op. cit., I*, p. 184.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 185. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 186-87. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 235-36.
[6] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit., I*, p. 280. [7] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, 156.
[8] Stavorinus: *op. cit., II*, pp. 485-86. They are mentioned as feeding the ants and other insects. *Ibid.*

marriage, etc. About the Hindus, it has been pointed out that "theology is so blended with the whole moral and civil obligations of life that it enters into every habit and sanctions almost every action".[1] Violation of customs, which were purely social in themselves, was considered an offence against religion and the natural result was that religion was strengthening conservatism in people. In this context, the French missionary observes:

> "During the many years that I studied Hindu customs, I cannot say that I ever observed a single one, however unimportant and simple, and I may add, however filthy and disgusting, which did not rest on some religious principle or other. Nothing is left to chance; everything is laid down by rule, and the foundation of all their customs is purely and simply religious. It is for this reason that the Hindoos hold their customs and usages to be inviolable, for being essentially religious, they consider them as religion itself."[2]

He dilates on their conservatism, their unswerving attachment to their social customs and rules.[3] Both people of the upper and lower classes scrupulously stuck to their customs and practices; they would not eat forbidden foods, but submit to starvation, observe all the rules of caste, family, etc., thinking that their observance was calculated to promote their religious purity.[4] The idea of sacredness in fact pervaded the entire social code and the dread of pollution did not encourage the individual to break away from it in a dynamic revolutionary manner. It is also true that religious ideas made him non-progressive in outlook in many respects. Robert Orme says how for dread of impurity, his religion forbade him "to quit his own shores" and he would not readily assimilate the customs and ways of other nation, nor would he like to "convert the stranger to his own opinions". "That if a foreigner were to solicit the privilege of worshipping Vishnu, his proposal would be received with the utmost contempt."[5] Bolts also points out how this dread of impurity confined the people of India within their

[1] Forbes: *op cit.*, *I*, p. 42. [2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 31.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 305.
[4] Tennant: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 5. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 193. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 429-31. Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 124.
[5] Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 7; also Tennant: *op. cit.*, pp. 142-62.

own country "leaving remote commerce and navigation" to others.[1] To Brahmans, says Dubois, even the shadow of unclean objects was an anathema: "When a Brahman doctor wishes to feel the pulse of a sick Sudra," says he, "he first wraps up the patient's wrist in a small piece of silk, so that he may not be defiled by touching the man's skin."[2] There is evidence that other groups were influenced by like notions. Forbes complains that "although a European carries his own provisions, very few of the natives will allow him to enter their houses to eat them", that these people, "like the Pharisees of old, make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, while they neglect the weightier matters of law".[3] Toren who visited Surat about 1750 noted that an "old complaisant Parsee woman", who gave him some milk, "would not let her bottle come within a quarter of a yard" of his glass.[4]

On the whole, the European accounts emphasize that religion was exercising a very formative influence on Indian character. They also stress that the influence of religion was "unfavourable to the cause of morals" as it promoted fatalism, a spirit of resignation and diffident outlook.[5] Moreover, religion was also supporting the entire structure of superstitions. Many of these, such as the machinations of the witches, the curses of evil spirits, and the wrath of angry gods, were bolstered up by the psychology of fear and pessimism fostered by religion. We will now study the various superstitions prevalent in society.

## *Popular Superstitions*

Like religion superstition had a deep hold over the credulity of the people, who were the unconscious dupe of seers, astrologers and fortune-tellers, "dealers in Destiny's dark counsel". They pierced the dark and thick veil of futurity and their predictions were earnestly swallowed by the masses. Belief in the influence of the planets and stars over human life, of witches and evil spirits that "paced with printless feet the dewy green in

[1] Bolts: *Considerations on Indian Affairs*, p. 2.
[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 184. [3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 128.
[4] Osbec: *Voyage of China and the East Indies*, *II*, p. 189.
[5] Wilks: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 285.

many a forest glade" was also widespread to an extent which it is difficult to appraise.

To the priestly classes astrology was a lucrative profession. Through its aid, people of all classes explored the possibilities of health, wealth and prosperity in this material world. We learn that the astrologers were consulted as to the auspiciousness of days and even moments for the commencement of every business. Without their advice hardly a journey was undertaken, a matrimony settled or a contract consecrated. The priests of the lower classes freely dealt in "all absurdities mentioned in the Hindu almanac, such as lucky and unlucky days, favourable or unfavourable moments for beginning a fresh undertaking, and other prophecies of a like nature". Of course, they were "forbidden to meddle with anything pertaining to astronomy, such as the foretelling of eclipses, changes of the moon, i.e., the prerogative belonging exclusively to the Brahmans".[1] Astrology received the allegiance of all classes in the country. Hindus, Muslims, Indian Christians, "half-castes, and sometimes even Europeans, are not ashamed to consult the astrologer or purohit".[2] The almanacs prepared by the priests were in use in families of all faiths, and in Northern India astrology appears to have been practised by Hindus and Muslims alike. About Bengal Scrafton writes:

> "So that between the Mahometan and Gentoo astrologers together, one half of the year is taken up in unlucky days. The head astrologer is ever present at all their councils; no new enterprise is begun without his being first consulted, and his veto is as effectual as that of a Tribune in the Roman Senate."[3]

It is mentioned that Mubash-shir Khan, the father of the well-known Badshah Begum of Oudh, practised astrology and that every year he prepared the new almanac, presented it to the nobles "who awarded him great or small sums ranging from rupees five to five thousand". This was his means of livelihood.[4] Ghulam Husain says that Muslim nobility commenced their journeys and expeditions at auspicious moments

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 382-84. also Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 58. Wilks: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 26, footnote. [2] Dubois: *op. cit*, p. 138.
[3] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 16-7. [4] *Tarikh Badshah Begum*, p. 5.

and that Mir Kasim understood something about astrology and believed in its maxims and predictions. It is stated that "he procured the child's horoscope to be accurately drawn by able astrologers".[1] Often some crafty people also made ample use of astrology to flatter the vanity of the Europeans.[2] Europeans, too, frequently consulted the Indian astrologers and believed in their predictions. Forbes in particular commends the predictions of the Brahman astrologers. He speaks highly of a Brahman, well known at Bombay, Surat and Cambay, and relates three anecdotes "in confirmation of the penetrating spirit, preternatural gift, or whatever term may be allowed for the talent which this man possessed". He made his predictions "long before the events happened, and were literally accomplished".[3]

The belief that the stars above govern the fortunes of mortals below was paramount in society. The diaries of Anand Ranga

[1] *Seir-Mutaqherin, II*, p. 387.

[2] Pillai: *op. cit., II*, pp 313-14.

The following conversation reveals how Pillai, the unblushing sycophant of Dupleix, pandered to his master's vanity. This was in the year 1746 when Anglo-French conflict was going on.

Pillai to Dupleix: "If you will not take offence at the liberty I take, I will mention a small incident which I remember."

Dupleix: Not at all. Proceed.

Pillai. This time last year, a Brahmin (referring to the circumstance that the ships had not arrived) assured me that in the current month of the year, the Governor would capture Madras, Fort St. David, and Cuddalore and gather very much renown.

Dupleix: Was it a Brahmin who said this?

Pillai: Yes sir.

Dupleix: No other class of men can bear comparison with Brahmins in point of intelligence.

Pillai: Quite so. The Brahmin further said that when the attention of the King of France was drawn to these achievements, he would be so much gratified that he would appoint the Governor a Marshal?

Dupleix: How did the Brahmin come to know of the title of Marshal.

Pillai: What the Brahmin said was that the Governor was destined to be eminently fortunate . . . and that his career thenceforth (after victories) would be one of marked distinction. . . .

"This aroused joy in his heart" concludes our diarist, and he cried out laughingly "many thanks, much obliged."

[3] Forbes: *op. cit., II*, pp. 116-17. For anecdotes see pp. 117-25.

Pillai, who was superstitious to an incredible extent, point out the feelings of the people about the influence of the stars—good and evil—which were held to operate vigorously on the current of human life. He has graphically described the chief incidents which attended the death of the son of the chief Dubash, Kanakaraya Mudali in his family, stating that during minority, the luck or ill-luck of a son attacks his father. This boy was born at a time when the rising sign Zodiac was Cancer, "so the term of life allotted to him in this world was twenty-one years, one month and nine days". The dominant planetary at the time of his birth was that of the Malign Ketu so his father lost his appointment, was subjected to dishonour, and even compelled to quit his native place. "But on the advent of planetary period of Venus, in succession to Ketu, he had the enjoyment of all the honours and affluence ascribable to the merit of that heavenly body". According to the boy's horoscope, the potentiality of Venus for good was great, owing to the position it held in the Zodiac. It was alone in the sign of birth, which was a quadrant, and was moreover aspected by auspicious planets. Consequently Panayur Narayana, the astrologer who had cast the nativity of the child, foretold long before Kanakaraya Mudali's return to fortune and "the highest power in the State". The other evil incidents after the funeral of the deceased son, fire on the border of the garment worn by the mother, fire in adjacent residence, are mentioned as happenings according to the predictions of the astrologer.[1]

The appearance of a star in broad day light was held to be a marvel and a strange phenomenon. The blazing of a star and its fall foreboded evil. The appearance of a comet, the star "with a tail", signalized bad times, and agitated the public.[2] The constellation of Rohini was believed to be an auspicious signal of the heavens, and things commenced at this auspicious time were considered to bear good results.[3] If some child was born with some bodily defect or deficiency, it was attributed to "the evil influence of two unlucky constellations which must have been in conjunction at the time of his birth or to some eclipse of the sun or moon that took place at that moment".[4]

[1] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 102-03. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 243-45, 251.
[3] *Ibid.*, *IV*, p. 10. [4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 319.

Dubois gives an elaborate outline of the principles on which astrologers calculated the influence of the celestial bodies, the phenomenon of eclipses, etc. According to him, astrology was "a science which opens so vast a sphere to the imagination". Undoubtedly in India, priests had raised it to the status of almost an exact science. Each planet in turn was supposed to exercise its influence during the space of a year. The ruling planet was attended by another playing the part of a minister, and this latter in the following year assumed "the supreme functions of the former; and so on year after year". Some of the planets were believed to be beneficent, others unkind. The Moon, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus belonged to the former category. Under their influence everything prospered, men were happy and blessed with abundance, "the fertile fields yield rich harvest, and the fruitful trees bear abundantly". The Sun, Mars and Saturn belonged to the other category, causing evil both to animate and inanimate nature. There reign was almost always disastrous: "men are oppressed with sickness; . . . they experience only broils and disappointments; moreover the rains hold off, the soil becomes unfruitful, famine and misery everywhere prevail".[1]

Like notions were attached to the various clouds, Samvarta, Avarta, Pushkala, Drone, the seven elephants and the seven snakes, etc.[2] Of the seven days of the week, three days, i.e., Sunday, Tuesday and Saturday, were considered unlucky and no important business or journey was undertaken on these days. Of the 27 stars of each lunar month, seven were considered unlucky and everything begun under their influence was attended with disastrous results.[3] Dubois describes how Hindu astrologers divined into futurity:

> "By the combination of the 12 signs of the Zodiac with the planets and with the star which was in the ascendant on each day of the moon, Hindu astrologers believed themselves capable of telling the secrets as well as the future events of life. By comparing the celestial phenomena, and studying the different signs of the Zodiac they divined into the past, the present and the future and even to recover things lost or stolen. By the same means they even tried to find out not only the place where a stolen thing was secreted, but also the sex and the

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 383. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 383-84. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 385.

caste of the thief. They also told whether a person who had been long absent was dead or alive, sick or healthy, at liberty or in prison and whether he would return or not."[1]

The valued privileges of the priests included their right to compile horoscopes and almaaacs. The former were prepared by the priests for individual life at the time of birth and the belief of people in them was great. Pillai constantly referred to the texts of his horoscope for the various fortunes and misfortunes which befell his family and he found it a sure guide. His horoscope could also tell him that "the weak and fruitless star" of his brother "will cast its shadow over me for some months to come". It told him that his career up to his 38th year could not be marked by success.[2] When something happy happened, he was exultant and noted "what was written in my horoscope has now been confirmed, namely, that I should live to the age of ninty-nine years, for this day has clearly revealed the enemy who has been so long doing mischief".[3] These horoscopes were calculated on the basis of the study of the influence of stars, the sign of the Zodiac under which people were born. The *Lagnam* or the sign at the moment of birth was combined with the planet and the star of the day, and it was ascertained "beyond doubt whether the child is born to be happy or unhappy".[4]

The almanac was the calendar for the year and an absolute necessity to the priest. The ignorant priest obtained copies from those who were "sufficiently well versed in astronomy to be able to calculate the eclipses and variations of the moon". It described the lucky and unlucky constellations, fortunate and inauspicious days, hours and moments and the priests on their basis predicted happy and unhappy events in life. Princes and persons alike consulted them and Dubois says that in large temples of South India "a purohit is specially retained to read to the idols every morning the predictions for the day contained in the almanac".[5] This calendar was known as *Panchangam* "which means the five members because it contains five leading subjects: to wit, the age of the moon in the month: the constellation near which the moon is situated on each particular day; the day of the

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 384-85. [2] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 9-10.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 103. [4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 385. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 136-37.

week; the eclipses; and the positions of the planets. Lucky and unlucky days are also indicated", for instance when to begin the journey, in what direction and numerous other details.[1] It is mentioned that at the New Year, amidst music and dance, the Purohit summoned the people and read the almanac and all, particularly the lower classes, believed, his prophetic utterances.[2]

Next to it, the belief of people, particularly of the lower strata, in ghosts and evil spirits encouraged crude superstitious practices in society and bred a wily class of charlatans and imposters who trafficked wildly with the credulity of the masses. People believed in a host of supernatural forces of different descriptions, some amiable to the human race, the angels, others in a constant state of war with it, the evil spirits, ghosts, genii, etc. The latter were widely propitiated in different ways.[3] Diseases and ailments which stupefied the craft of the physician were attributed to evil agencies and the faith of the lower classes in the efficacy of incantations was very strong. Their priests practised the art of divination, exorcism, sorcery and occultism. In Northern India and Malwa, the Kaphirs, Ojhas, Sokhas, Bhopahs are mentioned as well versed in these arts.[4] The lower classes in the South were replete with such divines; Canies and Shaycanas have been noted in particular.[5] In the district of Bhagalpur, in Bihar, Buchanan writes that the priests of most of the villages were the Kaphirs, who were "supposed to be capable of inspiration by gods and devils Those who are in danger from disease not only apply to procure favour from the god, but to know the result". He mentions his subtle ways also: "When the Kaphir makes the offering, he becomes violently agitated, after the usual mummery gives a response." By looking at a pot of water, he could foretell events and their results: "If the water is agitated when the offering is made, it is supposed that the deity has come to assist in the recovery which will of course take place." Another class of men

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 137; also Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 16-7.

[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 138.

[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 70. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 417. Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. LXXVI-XXXIII. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 143-44. Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 357.

[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 131, 444-45. Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 215.

[5] Dubois; *op. cit.*, pp. 143-44. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 44, 55, 152; *III*, pp. 17, 23.

was of Chatiyas, many of whom were Brahmans and practised the art.[1] About the district of Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, Buchanan says that about 1450 men pretended to be versed in the art of incantation and though the greater part was of lower castes, yet even Rajputs and Brahmans were not ashamed to profess it. No man of decent education, however, fell a prey to the vicious art. About 350 people were employed to cure the bites of serpents and the rest to cure diseases arising from the influence of devils. The Chhapahas belonging to the eastern parts read incantations in the Bengali dialect, the Sokhas were "the priests of the district proper".[2] He very graphically describes the mode of operation of a Sokha:

> "The Sokha every Monday sits under some large tree, beneath a canopy, and generally a platform of smoothed clay. People, whose kindred are sick, or who are involved in the troubles of law, make them offerings, and are instructed what to do in order to escape from both evils, the Sokha pointing out what deity or spirit can give the requisite assistance. The Sokhas do not rave like the women pretending to be possessed of the Mahamaya (great mother), and their number was said to amount to about 60 persons."[3]

The fear of evil spirits and ghosts was a chronic phenomenon in the low ranks of the population all over the country and certain epidemics like cholera, smallpox, etc., were idolized and regularly worshipped as deities of the respective category.[4] In his learned treatise, *The Advancement of Learning*, Bacon has truly remarked that "the weakness of man is such that they will often prefer a montabank or witch before a learned physician". In Indian society, such superstitious beliefs provided the basis for a variety of crude rites through the agency of low-class priests. Buchanan's descriptions of some of the rites of low tribes in South India to propitiate destructive deities to cure sterile women, to relieve men of their troubles show how low the mind of man can stoop when it acts as slave to superstition.[5] The exorcism practised was often characterized by a

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 151. [2] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 444. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 445

[4] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 191; *II*, p. 749. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 242, 359; *II*, pp. 721-22; *III*, pp. 17, 358, 508-09.

[5] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 242,319; *II*, p. 381; *III*, pp. 23, 184-85, 345.

gross display of violent methods and superstitious rites.[1] Dubois speaking of those who acted as sorcerers, soothsayers, necromancers remarks:

> "In a country where superstition, ignorance, and the most extravagant credulity reign supreme, it is no wonder that impostors abound and are able to make a large number of dupes."[2]

Women were also proficient in the art of exorcism of evil spirits. In the district of Gorakhpur, about 230 women of low castes, and an equal number in Shahabad, pretended to be under the inspiration of Mahamaya. "Even men of decent rank are sometimes compelled by the importunities of their wives to consult these creatures about their children, although all reasonable men hold them in utmost contempt".[3] In the illiterate low section of society, the mischief was augmented by the belief that outstanding personalities generally after their death roamed as ghosts in the unseen world, hence the wide extent of worship of ghosts in the lower strata. The ghosts had to be propitiated as they threatened from time to time the people in the land of living.[4]

Those who practised sorcery were also dreaded in society for the mischief they could do to others by their spells. Those who exercised their spells to do evil were, however, severely punished. Their two front teeth were pulled out of the jaw, so that they could not pronounce the spells accurately.[5] Under the Maratha Government, those who were suspected of invoking evil spirits against any family or person were fined and were harshly treated if they took no steps to relieve their victims of their spells. People relieved themselves of the influence of the evil spirits by offering prayers to the deity and performing various ceremonies.[6]

[1] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 45, 55, 152, 247; *III*, 17, 23.

[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 145. [3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 443-44.

[4] *Ibid.*, *I*, pp. 192-93. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 359, 397; *II*, p. 168; *III*, p. 17. Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 178-79. Pillai: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 106-08. Pillai writes how the Indian Christians also observed the superstitious ceremonies of sorcery etc. with the object of getting free from evil spirits.

[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 145.

[6] *Selections from Raja Satara's and Peshwa's Diaries*, *I*, Cases nos. 331-32, 400, *VII*, No. 619.

In the 18th century, belief of people in magic, "which gives shrewd people such influence over fools" too, appears to be quite strong. People living in the plains thought of their savage brethren in the jungles as masters of enchantments which could charm the wild world of snakes, tigers and elephants.[1] Ives writes how the lower classes on the coast of Coromandal believed that "there are a set of philosophers on the mountains, who have the secret of preserving life and of transporting their souls into other bodies of pleasure, and with the same facility making them return again. They give out, likewise, that these learned men have discovered the secrets of making gold; but this, say they, they never put in practice, but for their own immediate necessities".[2] Likewise of the Chowlis, merchants in general, they thought that they "have the power of life and death in their hands, and that they are very powerful in enchantments".[3] Those who were versed in the art of magic were supposed to hold even the universe under awe, and Dubois says that in Peninsular India, magic had found a favourable abode. He was not sure whether the Hindu sorcerers "retained the power of causing the moon, whether willing or not, to come down from the height of firmament; but short of this, there is nothing which Hindu magicians are incapable of doing. Thus there is not a single Hindu who does not, during the whole course of his life, dream about sorcery and witchcraft".[4] He quotes at length the various formulae of magic from a Hindu book, *Agrushada Parikshai*, teaching people the means of doing and counteracting evil and demonstrating the terrible potentialities of the black art.[5] The Mussulman population, too, was affected with like superstitions and the author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* gives an encyclopedic account of the main features of the art of magic and exorcism--Dawut which could not only cast out evils but command the presence of demons and genii. He mentions the different charms and amulets which could accomplish every conceivable miracle.[6] It is mentioned that in the final Anglo-Mysore war, Tipu solicited the aid of

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 385-86 also 77.
[2] Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 26-7. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 25.
[4] Dubois: pp. 385-86. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 387-95.
[6] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 303-407.

the magicians against the marching English army towards his capital but that the celebrated magicians of his and neighbouring country were no good in that difficult and critical position.[1] More than one authority has mentioned that Assam was the stronghold of men versed in magic, both amongst Hindus and Muslims. Kamakhya was cited as the main authority of their incantations. With the Brahmans, however, magic was not very popular in Kamrup.[2] The women of this province are mentioned both as very beautiful and "unequalled in the art of magic", in enchantments and tricks. They could make wise men mad and "in a second they can turn them into animals".[3] People living in the mountains of Kumaon were understood to be in possession of the philosopher's stone with which they could convert everything into gold.[4] Forbes writes how young disappointed ladies, in case of jealousy, revenge and other passions or to win affections, consulted the skilled ladies versed in spells.[5] Undoubtedly with the lower strata of society, belief in the potency of magic and its miracles was well grounded. In Bengal, the miracles of Kala Pahar, how the ears and nose of the idols fell at the sound of his drum, etc., were quite popular.[6]

When such was the state of superstition in society, it was natural enough that all kinds of amulets and talismans would be in use and people would believe in their efficacy. Children were armed with them from their very birth as they were supposed to guard them from evil effects of various calamities, diseases, infirmities and dangers. They were considered as evil-proofs and even efficacious against spells and sorcery.[7] Colonel Tod says that it was a popular practice with the Rajputs that on the birth of an infant, the father bound round its arm a root of the species of the grass known as Amardul or imperishable just like the Scottish women who wore round their neck blue woollen threads until they weaned their children.[8]

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 388-89.

[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 508. The author of Ryaz says: "The inhabitants of Kamrup are good-looking, and in magic raise the standard of majesty." *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 11. [3] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 100.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 58. [5] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 261.

[6] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 18.

[7] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 389. Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 273; Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 88-8. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 71-4. Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 144.

[8] Tod: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 415.

The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* gives vivid illustrations of the different types of amulets and charms worn on different parts of the body. From his account it is clear that even in Muslim society in South India, the art of constructing the *Taweez* (amulet), *Puleetu* (charm) and the science of *Tukseer* (magic numbers and squares) was not in disrepute and those versed in them were eagerly approached by the multitude.[1] He deals at length with the art of ascertaining unknown things by the help of *Unjun* or black lamp, or the *Hazirat*—the magic mirror, the flame of a charmwick and states that being himself highly educated he did not believe in them.[2]

The evidence in European accounts is particularly quite exhaustive on superstitions regarding witchcraft. The witches, whom Johnson, when questioned by the Laird of Auchinleck, explained "why, Sir, they properly mean those who make use of the aid of evil spirits", were women mostly old and haggard supposed to be in league with the powers of Darkness, proficient in the art of playing the devil upon people. The witch was also an odious term applied to those suspected of inflicting mischief and misery upon people. Everywhere women were deemed as patrons of the secrets of this diabolical art.[3]

Malcolm has dealt with popular ideas regarding witches in Central India:

> "The idea entertained of Dhakuns or witches is that certain women (generally the old and wrinkled) are endowed with a limited supernatural power, which though it does not enable them to see into futurity or to obtain what they wish, empowers them, with the aid of their familiar or Bheer, and by their incantations, to inflict pains, diseases, or death upon human beings, or animals, as they may desire to gratify their malice or resentment."

They were generally believed as wreaking their vengeance "by causing the gradual decay of the liver of the person or animal they wish to destroy". The power of witchcraft, which they possessed, was believed to be effective on the 14th, 15th and 29th of every month. During certain periods of the year, "particularly the 9th day before the Dusserah feast" and during the time

[1] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 347-75.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 376-90. [3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 112-13.

of Diwali in particular, they had most power. They were, however, not supposed to be ineffective or inactive in other months. At other periods, they are mentioned as appearing, dressing and eating like other women "but when the fit is on them, they are sometimes seen with their eyes glaring red, and their hair dishevelled and bristled, while their head is often tossed around in a strange convulsive manner". On the nights they were believed to go abroad, "and after casting off their garments, to ride upon tigers and other wild animals, and if they desire to go upon the water, the alligators come, like the beasts of the forests, at their call and they disport in rivers and lakes upon their backs till near dawn of day, about which period they always return home, and assume their usual forms and occupations".[1] Coleman says that like those in Scotland, they did not appear in India "on the blasted heaths", or as in England in ancient days "bestriding a broom stick and decently dressed in the cavalier hat and cloak of scarlet dye". But they were generally discovered "dancing naked at midnight, with a broom tied round their waists, either near the house of a sick person or on the outside of a village".[2] Whatever be the fact, belief in the potency of witchcraft appears to be well-grafted almost everywhere. Ali laments that superstition had a powerful ascendancy "over the minds of Asiatics generally", that even the "very wisest, the most learned, most religious are more or less tinctured with this weakness". She adds:

> "I have hardly met with one person entirely free from the opinion that witchcraft and evil agency are in the hands of some and often permitted to be exercised on the neighbours."[3]

She vividly relates how an old miserable hag, suspected of contaminating a child with illness, drew upon herself the ravings of a furious mob and was treated mercilessly with slippers. The child was then relieved of her spell, by the recitation of prayers on the hair plucked from her head and the whole game continued till the mob was dispersed by the armed soldiery of Lucknow.[4] The reflections of Malcolm and Sleeman reveal the

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 212-13.
[2] Coleman: *Mythology of the Hindus*, pp. 149-50. [3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 357.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 351-57.

depth to which this superstition had taken root with the people of remote hilly regions in Central India.[1] John Shore, who was elected president of the Asiatic Society after the death of Sir William Jones, informs us that charms and amulets were worn in India by even men of high education and upper classes, that astrologers were very much consulted, and that the power of witchcraft was "admitted by the vulgar in general". He cites two cases in which the charge of witchcraft "was made the pretence for depriving them of life".[2]

In this context it may be noted that the dread of the evil eye was quite a popular superstition. The *Nazar* of the envious and the malicious was to be avoided most carefully at the birth of the son. Broughton says that this superstition was so prevalent that it was taken as an affront if one remarked to another that he looked in good health or was getting fat and so on. The children were not dressed well "lest they should attract the glances of evil eye".[3] For fear of the witches, says Buchanan, children were called by some nickname because it was a popular belief that unless the child's proper name was known the witches could not make their mischief. This superstition was particularly strong in the hilly regions towards the east and in many villages about 50 "hags had the character of being witches".[4] The old women of Kamrup were generally considered at home in the science of witchcraft, and the young ones reputed for their beauty consulted them for their success in love.[5] The European accounts also mention the technique of detecting the witches. It consisted of a variety of ordeals by water and fire. Some of them, though remnants of barbaric passions, revealed great psychological ingenuity for detecting crime. The usual mode was the ordeal through water and even Pliny is mentioned as familiar with the notion that the Indian witches could not sink. The poor woman suspected of witchcraft was tied in a bag and thrown into

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 216. Sleeman: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 90, 92, 94.
Sleeman says that among the Gonds, no one married his daughter to a family without a witch and said, "If my daughter has children, what will become of them without a witch to protect them from witches of other families. . . ." [2] *Asiatic Researches*, *IV*, pp. 358-59.

[3] Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 207-08. [4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 445, 721-22.

[5] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 510. The witches of Thatta in Sindh were also celebrated for their art of stealing the hearts of children. *Araish-i-Mahfil*, pp. 116-17.

a pool of water. If she sank she was declared innocent, but if she managed to come up to the surface her guilt was established. In Central India, says Malcolm, she was compelled to drink the water used by carriers, leather being considered "scarer" of evil spirits. Drinking this water also implied among Hindus loss of caste. In serious cases their noses were chopped off or they were put to death.[1] About Central India, Malcolm writes that the persecution of women suspected of witchcraft was frequent. Zalim Singh, the Regent of Kotah State, with all his extraordinary talents, was remarkable for his weak childish superstitions.[2] About him Tod says that the "water ordeal" found great favour with him.[3] Religious mendicants and priests of low castes were specially considered adept in dealing with witches and exorcising the afflicted of their malign influence.[4] In British Indian territories at the close of the 18th century, this superstition assumed a mild form as it was declared an offence to take criminal action against any one supposed to be a witch.[5] Teignmouth, however, cites five stories of women being put to death for practising sorcery in Bengal and he also describes different modes of the detection of the crime.[6] In his letter of the 13th December, 1770, G. G. Ducarel, the supervisor of Purneah, informed the Board of Revenue at Murshidabad that there were "a particular set of people, whose profession was the discovery of witchcraft" and that accusations of witchcraft fell sometimes even on "the rich and substantial". Fornication and witchcraft were punished with fines of four or five thousand rupees.[7] Under the Maratha Government, we learn that even false accusations of sorcery were severely fined, and those who were found guilty of practising it, mostly men of low castes, were all the more heavily fined. The aid of a magician was invoked to detect the charges.[8]

We also come across other types of superstitions deep-rooted in society. People believed in certain omens as indications of good or evil. Three storms in one month were re-

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 214-16.
[2] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 213.
[3] Tod: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 106, 638.
[4] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 214.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 215.
[6] *Asiatic Researches*, *IV*, pp. 359-61.
[7] *Fourth Report—Committee of Secrecy 1773*, p. 114.
[8] *Selections from Satara Raja's and Peshwa's Diaries*, *II*, case nos. 92, 93, 108.

garded as an evil portent beckoning evil times.[1] If a hare crossed the path, it was an ill omen and the traveller had to cry halt as he would not succeed in his mission.[2] Similarly owls, cats, etc., were considered ill omens. Tod says that Zalim Singh of Kotah abandoned his house because an owl hooted on its roof.[3] It is said that on one occasion he ordered the expulsion of all the cats from the cantonment.[4] One-eyed man was also considered unlucky and it is reported that when Jaswant Rao lost one eye, he said: "I was before bad enough, but now I shall be the Guru or preceptor of rogues".[5] In connection with such superstitions, Tod, describing the visit of one Manik Chand, says:

> "He looked very disconsolate and explained that he had seven times left his tent and as often turned back, the bird of omen having each time passed him on the adverse side; but that at length he had determined to disregard it, as having forfeited confidence he was indifferent to the future."[6]

The bellowing and neighing in an unusual manner by cattle, horses, camels, etc., were held to portend some impending evil. Broughton informs us how on account of this and the persuasion of Brahmans, Scindhia averted the evil by distributing twenty thousand rupees among the Brahmans and gave orders for the army to march the next morning.[7] Poor Pillai on one occasion was very much vexed while going to his godown as a cat crossed the road every time and he had finally to go by a different street. Then he met an oil seller and his friend advised him to chew betel and wait for about an hour on the street. Afterwards he boarded his palanquin near a cobbler's shop, chewing betel and reached his godown at 7 o'clock.[8]

Dreams were also interpreted as rich in tidings for the future, and those experienced in the morning were held true. Before 5 o'clock one morning, Pillai says, he dreamt that a woman was handing him a bunch of keys and some seals and she said: "Here are the keys and seals of seven or eight forts. You will soon be master of them. I give them to you. Take care of them.

1 Pillai: *op. cit., I*, p. 293.
2 Tod: *op. cit., II*, p. 557.
3 *Ibid., I*, p. 253, footnote.
4 Malcolm: *op. cit., II*, p. 214, footnote.
5 *Ibid., IV*, p. 110.
6 Tod: *op. cit., I*, p. 694.
7 Broughton: *op. cit.*, p. 262.
8 Pillai: *op. cit., V*, pp. 82-3.

From this day you will be fortunate." He was very happy and believed that future had in store for him greater honours. His imagination almost ran wild and he amused himself thus: "According to my horoscope it is now the period of Venus. Today Saturn's sub-period ceases, and gives place to Mercury's tomorrow. Moreover I remember that Sita Ram, the astrologer from the South, predicted that from my fortieth year . . . I should possess 12 villages, wealth and elephants." As he was so wool-gathering, "the sparks shot out of the candle" and he was convinced that bright maiden of future was near at hand.[1] The appearance of beautiful girls in dreams "covered with jewels and precious stones" was interpreted as heralding good and happy news.[2] Special significance was attached to sneezing, if it synchronized with some work and warranted a different result than the one contemplated.[3]

Religion also encouraged superstitious beliefs in the miracles and supernatural gifts were attributed to saints of different ages. If religious ceremonies would not be properly performed, it was held that some disaster was in store. If the curtains in some church caught fire, and it spread to the altar as well, the Christians held the incident as portending some evil.[4] The Indian mind was very much liable to such superstitious beliefs. Buchanan mentions that the keeper of the monument of Pir Syed Shah at Rajmahal in Bengal stated how "over the gate there was an inscription, which, about ten years ago, a European took away by force. The infidel had scarcely removed the stone into his boat when a storm arose, and would have sunk him, had not he known the storm over-board".[5] In connection with the sacred well at Mongher, where Sita was alleged to have undergone the fiery ordeal in proof of her chastity, people told of another miracle—"that during the last hot season, the water of the well having become so cool as to admit of bathing, the Governor sent orders to prohibit the practice, because it rendered the water so dirty that Europeans could not drink it. But on the very day when the brick-layers began to build a wall, in order to exclude the bathers, the water became so hot that no one could bear to

[1] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *IV*, pp. 182-83. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.
[3] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 300. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2; *IV*, p. 344.
[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 66.

touch it, so that the precaution being unnecessary, the work of the infidels was abandoned".[1]

In India, communities of diverse shades of culture, beliefs and practices inter-mingled in an eclectic and tolerant religious system, and in consequence the structure of popular religion and superstitions was naturally very complicated. It is not possible to emphasize the differences on regional or communal basis. What can be safely emphasized is the fact that the religious life of the higher strata embraced beliefs and customs showing a higher stage of development but the religion of the lower strata was dominated by primitive culture.

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, pp. 43-4.

## *Chapter Five*

# Role of Education in Society

EUROPEAN writers do not throw light on many aspects of cultural life in India in the 18th century. Whatever comments they make on the fine arts like music, painting, architecture, etc., are superficial and do not permit of treatment at length. An intelligent appreciation of the real excellence and distinctive character of Indian arts and culture requires a kind of sympathy in which the European critics were, by and large, deficient. They almost overlooked the high level of development that had been achieved in the various spheres of arts in the preceding periods of Indian history. But this remark does not apply to the role of education in society which we shall consider in this chapter.

### *Importance of Education*

Indian society was fully conscious of the supreme importance of education in the life of the individual and community. The strictures passed by Bernier and many missionaries of earlier period that India was a land of "profound and universal ignorance", that academies and colleges were not to be found here are absolutely unwarranted.[1] In spite of the disturbed conditions of the 18th century and later years, we find that education

[1] Bernier: *op. cit.*, Smith, V.A. p. 229. Bernier says that in Indian society people were always kept under "blows from a cudgel" by the powerful selfish Omrahs. There was no incentive to the progress of arts and culture. He remarks on education:
"A profound and universal ignorance is the natural consequence of such a state of society as I have endeavoured to describe. Is it possible to establish in Hindoustan academies and colleges properly endowed? Where shall we seek for founders? or, should they be found where are the scholars? Where are the individuals whose property is sufficient to support their children at college? or if such individuals exist, who would venture to display so clear a proof of wealth? Lastly, if any persons should be tempted

(*Continued*)

was not neglected. Ideals of religion inspired love of education and learning. In the opinion of Ward, education was fostered by Hinduism, the dominant creed of the masses and a majority of the wealthy and powerful classes. To acquire knowledge of the *Shastras* and to encourage it by direct instruction or financial aid to scholars and teachers was considered an act of high religious merit. This impulse of religion sustained the Indian students amidst all the privations of a strenuous scholastic life and inspired teachers to give education freely in society. It led the wealthy classes to patronize learning and found institutions for promoting education.[1] These remarks are corroborated by the various instances, cited by Buchanan, of endowments for educational purposes made by the rich people and of private schools conducted by honest, diligent teachers in the northern territories of the East India Company in early 19th century.[2]

Many accounts refer to the patronage of arts and letters by the aristocracy. To Craufurd, Tanjore and other places under the Hindu princes spoke eloquently of "the mild protection of the government", "wherever the eye turned" before they were overrun by foreign armies.[3] The Maratha rulers of the period, with their preoccupations in political affairs, did patronise arts and letters. They honoured their poets and saints with titles, privileges and allowances. They confirmed the old endowments of the religious classes, both of Hindus and Muslims, and sanctioned additional grants from time to time for religious and educational purposes.[4] Elphinstone reports that the charities of the Peshwas "amounted to nearly Rs. 15,00,000, besides those of wealthy persons in employment under his government".[5] The

to commit this great inprudence, yet where are the benefices, the employments, the offices of trust and dignity, that require ability and science and are calculated to excite the emulation and the hopes of the young student?" *Ibid.*

Compare these remarks with those of William Duff to whom learning in Sanskrit was "an old-fashioned assortment of antediluvian metaphysics." Duff: *Indian Missions*, p. 25.

[1] William Adam: *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal*, p. 16.

[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 134; *II*, pp. 105, 711.

[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

[4] *Selections from Satara Raja's and Peshwa's Diaries: II*, case nos. 123, 167-78, 181, 187-88, 190-94; *VII*, nos. 679, 682, 684, 687-88, etc.

[5] Forrest: *op. cit.*, p. 59

custom of *Dakshina* or donations to the Brahmans, "whose proficiency in science and mythology entitled them to distinction", encouraged classical learning, "and the rewards were conferred in proportion to the requirements, moral, conduct and sanctity".[1] In his minute on Sanskrit learning in Nadia and Tirhut of 6th March, 1811, Lord Minto referred to "the liberal patronage which was formerly bestowed not only by princes and authority but also by the zamindars or persons who had distinguished themselves by the successful cultivation of letters at these places".[2] Buchanan makes the following mention about the Brahman Raja of Darbhanga:

> "The Darbhanga Raja, being himself a Brahman of very high birth, pays some attention to the education of the Pandits on his estates. When any man, therefore, has finished his education and wishes to assume the title of Pandit, the assembly is held before the Raja, who, when the new name is conferred, gives a dress, and places a mark on the forehead of the candidate."[3]

In Bengal, the two districts of Nadia and Rajshahi were centres of Sanskrit learning under the patronage of Raja Krishna Chandra and Rani Bhabani. The liberal Raja sanctioned a stipend of Rs. 200 to every student who resorted to the *Tols* of Nadia for education from distant places.[4] Rani Bhabani is also credited with having founded extensive endowments for Sanskrit learning. As late as 1834-35 Adam was impressed by the fact that in the district of Rajshahi, "even in a single *Thana*, there are materials for a Hindu university in which all the branches of Sanskrit learning might be taught".[5] The Muslim rulers were equally enthusiastic in the cause of education and learning. Their courts were adorned by men of letters and religious celebrities of even distant Muslim countries. Many like Hafiz Rehmat Khan gloried in the company of the learned men of their sect, dined and conversed with them.[6]

From these references, it is clear that education was sponsored by the elite. In the 18th century it is, however, futile to look

1 Duff: *History of the Marathas III*, p. 499.

2 Long: *Selections from Unpublished Records*, p. 554.

3 Martin: *op. cit*, *III*, p. 134.

4 *Calcutta Review*, *1872*, *IV*, pp. 103-04.

5 Adam: *Reports*, p. 169.

6 Elliot: *Goolistan-i-Rehmut*: p. 119.

for a high type of civic, progressive and cosmopolitan education. Education was entirely a private venture of the intelligentsia according to the social requirements of different groups. Nonetheless it was playing a decisive role in the cultural life of society. In the upper Muslim strata, provision was made for a liberal education to the child at an early age of five or six. We have the following testimony of Scrafton on this point:

> "They are then provided with tutors to teach them the Persian and Arabic languages; and, at this early age, they are brought into company where they are taught to behave with great gravity and circumspection . . . .
>
> They are also taught to ride and the use of arms . . . .
>
> When the hours of school and company are past, they return to the seraglio and the parents never scruple to admit them to all their plays and diversions . . ."[1]

The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* informs us that the ceremony of Bismillah, initiating both the boy and the girl into the study of the Holy Qoran, was performed at "the age of four years four months and four days". It was an occasion of joyous celebrations for the entire family.[2] In the higher section of the Muslim community, it has been observed that literary taste for classical poetry and *belles-lettres* was highly developed. They would embellish their conversation with the moral precepts of Sadi and excerpts from Hafiz.[3] Among the Hindus, the Brahmans are mentioned as a highly educated community. On account of their great learning in Sanskrit, they enjoyed considerable prestige among their countrymen. Buchanan says that they possessed "an intelligence far beyond other Hindus" and were also subject to "fewer vices".[4] They were not only the custodians of Sanskrit learning but also the instructors of the upper strata in this language. In the towns of Gujarat, Forbes met many Brahmans who had studied at Varanasi, and who were masters of the Sanskrit language. He refers to the towns on the bank of the Narbada "famous for Brahmin seminaries".[5]

[1] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 20-1.
[2] *Qanoon-i-Islam:* pp. 39-40. See also Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 148-49.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit*, *II*, pp. 232, 242. Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 89.
[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 711.
[5] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 98-9.

He makes the following observation on the amenities for education available for members of the high castes:

> "We contemplate the Hindoo colleges and Brahmanical seminaries, at Benares and different parts of Hindustan, with pleasure; they are useful institutions; and however limited in their benefits to particular castes and descriptions of people, they are the nurses of literature, medicine, and science as far as is deemed necessary among the Hindoos."[1]

Father Pons, a Jesuit missionary, testifies to the flourishing condition of the Hindu academies in the Carnatic. He has eulogized the courses of studies and methods of teaching in them.[2] Knowledge of the Scriptures was considered the highest accomplishment. To the Brahmans even recitation from the sacred works, says Buchanan, was "sufficiently meritorious to entitle them to the love of God, and the veneration of men".[3] Scrafton says that on account of their high religious learning, "these alone possess the magic Lanthorn, from which they reflect what objects they please".[4]

In the middle classes of society, in the urban and rural areas and even among the humble lower strata, education was not totally neglected. Reading and writing in the vernaculars, instruction in accountancy and crafts were quite popular. Ives writes of Bengal as early as 1756-57 that there were many schools for the education of children where they learned their mother tongue.[5] Forbes writes that in all towns there were "numerous schools for the education of other boys: they are generally in the open air, on the shady side of the house. The scholars sit on mats, or cow-dung floors, and are taught as much of religion as their caste admits of; as well as reading, writing and arithmetic".[6] The simplicity of the average Hindu school attracted his notice: "Nothing can be more simple than a Hindoo school; which is usually under a thatched shed open on three sides, with a sanded floor, on which the boys learn to write, and go through the first rules of arithmetic, in which science some of them make a great progress."[7] It is, however, true that the lower classes were not "enlightened by a purer system of reli-

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 471. [2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 381.
[3] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 65. [4] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 5.
[5] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 29. [6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 98-9 [7] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 55.

gion" or liberal education in higher arts and sciences.[1] Craufurd states the general position as follows:

"The usual education of the boys consists in teaching them to read and write. There are schools in all the towns and principal villages. The masters are Brahmans. The place where the boys are taught is generally a pandal, or a room made of leaves of the palm tree. The boys sit on the floor. The books are of leaves . . ."[2]

Regarding Central India, Malcolm writes:

"Though there is not one public place of instruction endowed by a state in the country, yet private schools both in the towns and villages are very numerous."[3]

According to him, in every village "that has above one hundred houses", there was a school master teaching the children of the merchant and agricultural classes.[4] Regarding the territories conquered by the British from the Peshwa, Elphinstone reports:

"I do not perceive anything that we can do to improve the morals of the people except by improving their education. There are already schools in all towns and in many villages, but reading is confined to Brahmans, Banyans, and such of the agricultural classes as have to do with accounts."[5]

About South India, Dubois writes that although provision for the diffusion of knowledge was not sound, schools were common. In large towns and "in the precincts of some of the more important temples", Brahmans imparted instruction, "some gratuitously and others for payment".[6]

These accounts clearly establish that there was sufficient provision for education in the pre-British period. The spiritual and practical value of education was widely recognized. The lovers and promoters of education did not die unwept, unhonoured and unsung. The saint and the scholar, the priest and the teacher occupied an honourable position in society. Dubois says that those who had a reputation for learning were highly esteemed in society.[7] "The town school master is held in

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, p. 126.
[2] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 275.
[3] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 190.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 191.
[5] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 75.
[6] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 381.
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 381-82.

great respect", says Malcolm, "and has often an annual festival celebrated in his honour at the town, when he goes through the streets, in procession with his pupils, and a collection is made for him".[1] The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* tells us that among Muslims, at all ceremonies concerning the child, the teacher's dues were ungrudgingly paid. Students treated their teachers as their father, "for people in the world are said to have four fathers"—their own father, their preceptor, their father-in-law and their spiritual guide.[2] He writes:

> "In short, they (Muslims) embrace every opportunity to compliment their tutor, for a blessing from his auspicious mouth is equivalent to perusing a hundred books; since while his curse rests upon anyone, the study of a hundred volumes will profit little: nay he should be esteemed equal to, if not greater than one's own father and mother; inasmuch as he makes one acquainted with the laws and writings of God and his messenger, and explains the doctrines of religion. While the natural parents nourish the body with temporal food, he provides it with spiritual."[3]

We shall now try to study the different systems of education: the Sanskrit education, the Persian and Arabic education and the vernacular education.[4]

## *Sanskrit Education*

In the eighteenth century, studies in the classical languages, namely, Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic, constituted the main syllabus of higher education. Scholarship meant proficiency in these languages. Foreign observers have commented on the fundamental importance of Sanskrit studies in Hindu society. Sir William Jones speaks of the Sanskrit language as the "most wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek and the Latin, more copious than the latter, and more exquisitely refined than

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit., II*, p. 192.

[2] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, pp. 48-9. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 50.

[4] For our account of these we shall frequently refer to the reports of William Adam who was deputed by Bentinck's Government in 1835 to study the conditions of indigenous education in Bengal. The value of these reports for our period is enhanced by the fact that Adam incorporated the previous enquiries into the subject.

either . . .[1] Alexander Dow has praised it as "the grand repository of the religion, philosophy and history of the Hindoos".[2] For all practical purposes, this language was almost dead, but learning in it was still eagerly cultivated by the Brahmans in particular.[3] The value of education in Sanskrit was almost confined to the upper strata of Hindu society, mostly the "twice-born" members of the high castes. It has been remarked that the works in Sanskrit, supposed to be of divine authority and inspiration, the Vedas, *Upanishads*, and other *Shruti* literature, were not permitted to be studied by the lower castes. The "canonical books" were "a bequest too sacred to be committed to vulgar hands" and were "closely guarded in the archives" of the learned Brahmans.[4] In the first decade of the 19th century Buchanan observed the strict Brahman monopoly of theological studies in the Sanskrit language. In Bengal, the Baidyas, medical caste, and some rich Kayasthas were permitted to study the Sanskrit works composed by wise men but they were denied the benefits of all sacred literature.[5] To the Muslim intelligentsia also, the Vedas were "an abstruse and mysterious subject" "covered with a veil of darkness, which they could never penetrate".[6]

The author of *Araish-i-Mahfil* gives a comprehensive account of the wide range of learning in the Sanskrit language. According to him, no individual could explore the unbounded sea of Sanskrit learning. The Vedas, *Upanishads*, and the six schools of philosophy—*Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Vedanta, Mimansa* —constituted the essence of higher scholarship. The *Dharmashastras*, the code of moral and religious laws, were also a favourite study. Knowledge of *Vyakaran* or grammar was considered absolutely necessary for acquisition of higher learning in the language. He mentions many other subjects on which there were treatises in Sanskrit – *Puranas* (history), Penances, Lilawati's writings on mathematics, sciences of medicine, astronomy, palmistry, astrology, magic and practical arts such as archery,

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 98-9.
[2] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xxi.
[3] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. xxii-iii. Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 5. Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 33.
[4] Tennant: *op. cit.*, p. 158. Duff: *Indian Missions*, p. 161. Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xxiii.
[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 713-14.
[6] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xxiii.

architecture, chemistry, music, veterinary art, jugglery, rope-dancing and so on.[1]

In the districts of Bengal, we find that there was varying emphasis on main subjects of study and Sanskrit education was highly specialized. In 1818, Ward counted about 28 colleges of Sanskrit learning in Calcutta, in which 173 scholars were educated. The chief subjects of study were *Nyaya* and *Smriti Shastras*.[2] In 1801 we learn that within the 24-Parganas, south of Calcutta as far as Kalpi, there were about 190 seminaries supported by voluntary contributions of the wealthy Hindus and endowments of charity lands. The subjects chiefly taught were Hindu law, grammar and metaphysics.[3] At Nadia, Ward enumerates 31 colleges containing 747 students. There were different colleges for different subjects such as *Nyaya*, law, poetry, astronomy and grammar. The principal studies were logic and law.[4] In 1838, H. H. Wilson found from personal enquiry at Nadia that there were about five or six hundred scholars with an average of 22 in each such college.[5] According to Adam, these accounts suggest that in Bengal there were about 12,600 scholars engaged in studies or teaching of Sanskrit.[6] Hindu colleges were generally built of clay from three or five rooms to nine or eleven at the initiative of the teachers who solicited alms for the construction of the building and free education and maintenance of their pupils.[7] Three types of colleges were especially found in Bengal—one for grammar, literature, rhetoric and mythology; the second for law and mythology; and the third for logic. According to Ward, "amongst one hundred thousand Brahmans, there may be one thousand who learn the grammar of the Sunskritu, of whom four or five hundred may read some parts of the Kavyu (or poetical literature) and fifty some parts of the Ulunkaru (or rhetorical shastras). Four hundred of this thousand may read some of the Smriti (or law works); but not more than ten any part of the Tuntrus (or the mystical and magical treatises of modern Hinduism). Three hundred may study the Nyaya (or logic), but only five or six the Meemangsu (explanatory of the ritual of the Vedas), the Sunkhyu (a system

[1] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, pp. 33-8. [2] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 21-2.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 22. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 77-8. [5] *Ibid*, p. 17. [6] *Ibid.*
[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-8.

of philosophical materialism), the Vedantu (illustrative of the spiritual portions of the Vedas), the Patunjulu (a system of philosophical ascetism), the Vaisheshika ( a system of philosophical anti-materialism) or the Vedas (the most ancient and sacred writings of Hindoos). Ten persons in this number of Brahmans may become learned in the astronomical shastras, while ten more understand these very imperfectly. Fifty of this thousand may read the Shree Bhaguvutu, and some of the Pooranus".[1]

The enquiries conducted by Buchanan in the first decade of the 19th century show that in the district of Rangpur in Bengal, in nine sub-divisions there were about 41 colleges of Sanskrit learning, where grammar, general literature, rhetoric, logic, law, mythology, astronomy and *Agam Shastras* were taught. Astronomy was studied by Brahmans to construct almanacs or magic science for astrology and chiromancy. The latter was considered a higher science as it taught the ritual of modern Hinduism. In the district of Dinajpur, in its seven divisions only, there were about sixteen colleges. The principal studies were, as at other places in Bengal, grammar, law and metaphysics and frequently the Vedas and the works dealing with the ritual of Hinduism and astronomy.[2]

These courses of studies in the Sanskrit language have been described at length by Adam. We shall briefly reproduce his account for the district of Rajshahi, where there were many colleges running on the old endowments of Rani Bhabani, and where education was highly specialized. The studies embraced a full course in general literature, grammar, lexicology, poetry, drama and rhetoric. The chief object of education was to give sufficient knowledge of the language so that it could be effectively utilized as a vehicle for the communication of ideas. Grammar was the favourite subject of study, and "the most extensive and profound treatises on it in the Sanskrit language" were in general use. These were Panini, Kalapa, Mugdhbodha, and Ratnamaly. On these works, the commentaries of different authors were used. The verbal roots of these grammars were "committed to memory". Simultaneously with a study of grammar, a knowledge of words and their synonyms was acquired. This branch of study has been described by Adam as

[1] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 18-9. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 106-09, 112-13.

lexicology. It gave the student a command of words for use in reading and composition. After the acquaintance with the language and its grammar, the study of different poetic works was taken up. These works were mostly on ancient mythology and the epic period. According to Adam, the study of dramatics was "almost wholly neglected" in this district. The students also studied the rules of prosody and rhetoric. This comprised the complete course in philology and general literature.[1] The subjects were taught by different teachers who had specialized in different branches. "The teacher of grammar only", says Adam, "the mere grammarian, ranks in the lowest scale of learned men; and in proportion to the number of the other branches of general literature which he adds to his requirements, he raises his reputation and emoluments as a *Sabdik* or philologer."[2] In the colleges of Hindu law which were 19 in this district, the period of study varied from eight to twenty-three years. The compilations of Raghunandana, comprising twenty-eight books or texts collected from the institutes of ancient legislators, were the chief study. The other subjects of study included the ritual of Hinduism, social customs and rules relating to marriage, penance, purifications, obsequies, inheritance, etc.[3] In the colleges of logic, the full course of studies required from twelve to twenty-two years, and included preliminary studies in grammar. The following works were read by students: *Bhasha Parichhida*—introduction to the subject with definitions of terms, qualities and objects; *Vyapti Panchaka*—inherent qualities of objects; *Sinha Vyaghra*—supplement to the above; *Vyaddhikaranadharma* and *Bachinabhavu* on the same subject; *Siddhanta Lakshana* on the same subject, etc., and many others on inferential propositions, definitions, syllogism, fallacies, attributes of divinity, etc.[4] There were separate colleges for the study of *Vedanta*, *Puranas*, *Tantras* and medicine. In these colleges, the other branches of literature were also taught. In the Pauranic institutions the epics and works on astrology were also studied. In the Tantric ones, besides *Tantrasara*, grammar and *Vedanta* were also taught. In the medical colleges, the student spent

[1] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp 176-77.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 177-78.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 178-79.
[4] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 179-80.

about rupees sixteen in copying from the standard works on the causes of disease and their diagnosis, on the medical practice and materia-medica. They then learnt them step by step.[1] In other districts of Bengal, dramatic literature was more extensively read. Logic occupied the highest seat of honour. In law both Manu and Mitaksara were studied.[2]

From these accounts, it can be appreciated that education in Sanskrit, even though unaided by the State, continued to flourish. We do not have elaborate references to South India, still it is not difficult to see that the studies in theology and *Jyotishshastra* were popular with the Brahmans. Buchanan observed that they had numerous manuscripts on these subjects in their possession.[3] The standards of learning, too, do not appear to be low. He tells us that reading, writing, letters of accounts and business were "reckoned very mean accomplishments". "A plain composition in prose and consisting merely of common sense," he says, "is looked upon as a kind of reading beneath the dignity of a man of learning, who ought always to compose in poetry; and the more obtruse he renders his meaning by allegories the better."[4] Dubois corroborates his view by stating that the art of versification and studies in poetry were held in high regard among the Hindus.[5]

Judging from the requirements of the modern society, the practical utility of most of the Sanskrit branches of study is questionable. To Buchanan most of the learning in the language appeared as "a stock of chicane".[6] To the authorities in England, a great deal of it was "frivolous", "mischievous" and without "utility".[7] According to Malcolm, education in Sanskrit completely ignored historical studies and was primarily related to the fables of the ancient age and the rights and customs of religion. "A few Brahmins acquire a knowledge of astrology", says he, "so far as it is necessary for the purposes of judicial astrology."[8] To the Hindus, however, the Sanskrit language was a precious

[1] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 180-82. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[3] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 304-06, 425; *III*, pp. 170-71, 469-70.
[4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 247. [5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 396.
[6] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 104.
[7] Despatch Court of Directors in the year 1821 quoted by Martin: *Indian Empire*, *I*, p. 536, footnote.
[8] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 193-94.

link with antiquity. In it were enshrined the memories of their ancient culture and ideals. It cannot be denied that much of the intellectual activity directed towards the mastery of the fables and speculations of the past could with profit be utilized in modern arts and sciences. But it required a radical shock to awaken the Indian mind "from the sleep of centuries" and "dreamy sort of existence". There was, however, much to be commended in the old accomplishments of Sanskrit learning. Even as a handmaid of theology, it did not ignore the basic requirements of civil society. The studies in law did not merely include precepts of religion but also the rules of contract, inheritance, etc., which applied to the Hindu society. The six *Darshanas* were not merely expositions of theological doctrines but were "systems of philosophy on logic, on spirit and matter, and on moral and legal obligation". An intelligent study of the mythological literature, the epics and the *Puranas* was equally instructive as it contained "a system of metaphysical philosophy, disquisitions on political morality, and probably remnants of true history, mixed up with the fables of heroes and of gods". Astrology, in the wider sense, was a science of computation and not merely divination, based on astronomy and mathematical science. "Finally", as Adam says, "the works on grammar, general literature and rhetorical composition will be valued as long as the philosophy of language shall be studied, or the Sanskrit language itself employed as an instrument for the expression of thought and sentiment."[1]

## *Persian and Arabic Education*

In the pre-British period, Persian occupied the privileged position of a State language in the greater part of the country. It was not only studied by the Muslim ruling community but also by many Hindu classes which aspired for service with the governments. Society in Northern India also valued Persian learning as an essential cultural distinction. Buchanan states that in Bengal and Bihar, the Persian schools were popular with both the Hindus and Muslims "for the Persian language is considered as a necessary accomplishment for every gentleman". All those

[1] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 275-76.

who wished "to acquire fortune in the courts of law" had to study it.[1] In Bihar, the Hindus, proficient in this language, were also entitled to be called *Munshis*.[2]

Scholarship in the Persian and Arabic languages flourished under the patronage of many courts. The courts of Nawab Safdar Jang in Oudh and of Alivardi Khan in Bengal were a haven of refuge to eminent scholars of the age. Ghulam Hussain mentions the names of many doctors of law and theology, scholars of poetry, and religious men of great distinction patronized by Alivardi Khan. Some of them are described as men of angelic virtues and integrity. Here is a short account of some of them. Molvi Nassar, a native of Shahpara, "whose tomb and monument are in great repute in the province of Oudh"; Mir Mahmud Alim, one of the most venerated and virtuous residents of Azimabad, a disciple of the great poet, Mirza Moi-munsvi Khan; Shah Mahmud Amin, "a man much versed in the science of the Coran and so very intelligent as to be inferior only to an angel"; Shah Khizar, a native of Basarah, a religious man of great distinction; Syed Mir Mahmud Sadjad, a man of high virtues and merits; Syed Alim Ullah, the grandfather of our historian.[3] The accounts of the period do not throw light on the standards or range of learning. The higher studies usually centred round theology, law and literature. From the account of Ghulam Hussain it appears that sciences were not altogether ignored. He cites the name of Muhammad-al-Midu Bed Ali at Patna whose erudition touched "the whole circle of science", and who was thoroughly versed in the "mazes and depths of astrology".[4] The Maulvis of Rangpur district are also mentioned by Buchanan as teaching "the higher parts of Persian literature".[5]

In the period under review, owing to the overthrow of the Muslim rule education in the Persian and Arabic languages declined rapidly. Higher learning in the Arabic language was almost completely neglected. The Arabic schools of Bengal, existing in the early 19th century, have been spoken of by

[1] Martin: *op. cit., II*, p. 710. [2] *Ibid., I*, p. 133.

[3] *Seir Mutaqherin: II*, pp. 165-75. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 176.
On account of his holiness and learning we learn that rulers like Suja-uddaula and Mir Kasim visited him and he "received them sitting". *Ibid.* Translator's footnote.

[5] Martin: *op. cit. III*. pp. 132-33.

Buchanan as insignificant and worthless institutions. They did nothing more besides making the students familiar with the language. The different Arabic sciences were not even touched upon. The *Mullas* who were incharge of them had mostly crammed up the Holy text without understanding it literally. Very few of the *Kazis* also are mentioned as understanding it, or Arabic works on law, metaphysics or grammar.[1] Education in Persian was, however, fairly widespread. According to Buchanan, it was considered as a "polite language that every gentleman, Hindu or Muslim, should understand".[2] Among Hindus, the Kayasthas are mentioned as a very educated community so far as the Persian language is concerned. In the district of Shahabad in Bihar, he observed that "almost every Kayastha" endeavoured to study Persian.[3] Malcolm writes that in Central India, no man of their castes was "without education" and could ever be seen "in a state of mendicity or even menial employ". He writes:

> "The Kaiths assert that their origin is coeval with the invention of letters: that they were created to be intellectual, not a labouring class, and they in consequence deem themselves devoted to learning. They are almost all taught to read and write Persian: and in Central India they learn the Nagree or Hindu dialect, in which business is commonly transacted. They have few prejudices, and no pride of caste; the qualifications which they derive from their education and industrious habits are always in the market. In all offices which require a knowledge of writing and accounts, such as secretaries and clerks in the army, and in the country down to the lowest village registers."[4]

The schools for Persian in existence were mostly of elementary instruction, and were called *Maktabs* or *Madarsas*. They were supported by the various endowments made by Mughal princes and nobles. The *Madarsa* at Patna was founded by the Nawabs of Bengal[5]—the one at Kusbeh Bagh was endowed by Emperor Shah Jahan.[6] At Murshidabad, Hodges observed that the *Cuterah*, "a public seminary for men of learning among the

[1] Martin: *op. cit. II*, p. 711; *III*, p. 133.
[2] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 484.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 133.
[4] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 504.
[5] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp, 166-67
[6] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 162-63.

Mussulmans" built by Zafar Ali Khan, was among the "few buildings of note".[1] The number of schools run by *Maulvis* and *Akhuns*, a general word for Muslim teachers, and supported by contributions from the public and the pupils was also large in every district.[2] Arabic was also generally studied in these schools. In Northern India those who were responsible for higher instruction in Persian and Arabic were called *Maulvis*. *Mianjius* and *Khulifahs* were teachers of lower elementary schools.[3] Very few, however, could complete the full course of Persian education. The generality was content with elementary instruction.[4] The usual course of instruction in Persian has been described by Buchanan in Bihar as follows:

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[1] Hodges: *op. cit.*, p. 18.
[2] Martin: *op. cit. I*, p. 133; *II*, pp. 105, 710-11; *III*, p. 504.
[3] *Ibid., I*, pp. 132-33. [4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid., I*, p. 132.

Buchanan as insignificant and worthless institutions. They did nothing more besides making the students familiar with the language. The different Arabic sciences were not even touched upon. The *Mullas* who were incharge of them had mostly crammed up the Holy text without understanding it literally. Very few of the *Kazis* also are mentioned as understanding it, or Arabic works on law, metaphysics or grammar.[1] Education in Persian was, however, fairly widespread. According to Buchanan, it was considered as a "polite language that every gentleman, Hindu or Muslim, should understand".[2] Among Hindus, the Kayasthas are mentioned as a very educated community so far as the Persian language is concerned. In the district of Shahabad in Bihar, he observed that "almost every Kayastha" endeavoured to study Persian.[3] Malcolm writes that in Central India, no man of their castes was "without education" and could ever be seen "in a state of mendicity or even menial employ". He writes:

> "The Kaiths assert that their origin is coeval with the invention of letters: that they were created to be intellectual, not a labouring class, and they in consequence deem themselves devoted to learning. They are almost all taught to read and write Persian: and in Central India they learn the Nagree or Hindu dialect, in which business is commonly transacted. They have few prejudices, and no pride of caste; the qualifications which they derive from their education and industrious habits are always in the market. In all offices which require a knowledge of writing and accounts, such as secretaries and clerks in the army, and in the country down to the lowest village registers."[4]

The schools for Persian in existence were mostly of elementary instruction, and were called *Maktabs* or *Madarsas*. They were supported by the various endowments made by Mughal princes and nobles. The *Madarsa* at Patna was founded by the Nawabs of Bengal[5]—the one at Kusbeh Bagh was endowed by Emperor Shah Jahan.[6] At Murshidabad, Hodges observed that the *Cuterah*, "a public seminary for men of learning among the

1 Martin: *op. cit.* II, p. 711; III, p. 133.
2 Ibid., I, p. 484.
3 Ibid., III, p. 504.
4 Malcolm: *op. cit.*, II, pp, 166-61
5 Martin: *op. cit.*, I, p. 133.
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[3] *Ibid.*, *I*, pp. 132-33. [4] *Ibid.* [5] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 132.

tion, to correct and elegant language, and to trains of consecutive thought".[1] On the standards of education in Persian schools of Bengal, Adam offers the following remarks:

> "In Persian schools elementary and grammatical works, forms of correspondence, and popular poems and tales are chiefly read, occasionally a work on rhetoric or treatise on theology or medicine is also met with."[2]

In Arabic education the emphasis was on language and grammar. The works read by students in Bengal on grammar and syntax of the language were *Mizan*, *Tasrif*, *Zubda* on the inflections, *Sharh-i-Miat Amil* on the syntax.[3] According to Buchanan learning in Arabic was not at all valued in society. Even the ecclesiastical classes of the Muslim society—the *Pirzadas*, the *Kazis* and the *Mullas*—were devoid of literary accomplishments. Even those who were reputed as Hafiz had committed the Qoran to memory and did not understand it. Many *Mullas* could read the language but could not explain it. As few of their congregations understood Arabic, they were also "in little danger cf detection".[4] In some of the Arabic schools of Bengal, Adam, however, observed a more advanced type of education than that in the Persian schools. He writes:

> "In the Arabic schools the course of study takes a much wider range. The grammatical works are numerous, systematized, and profound; complete courses of reading on rhetoric, logic and law are embraced; the external observances and fundamental doctrines of Islam are minutely studied; the works of Euclid on geometry and Ptolemy on astronomy in translation are not unknown; other branches of natural philosophy are also taught, and the whole course is crowned by the perusal of treatises on metaphysics deemed the highest attainment of the instructed scholars. Perhaps we shall not err widely if we suppose that the state of learning amongst the Mussulmans of India resembles that which existed among the nations of Europe before the invention of printing."[5]

[1] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 149-51.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 295.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 164, also p. 279.
[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, p. 143; *II*, p. 724.
[5] Adam: *op. cit.*, p. 295.

## *Vernacular Education*

There were the vernacular schools which played a decisive role in promoting literacy among the masses. The benefits of education in these schools were within the reach of all classes in society. What is really pleasing about them is their cosmopolitan character. Teachers and pupils were recruited from all castes and classes, and their day-to-day working shows remarkable fraternization between the two great communities. Of these schools in the district of Dinajpur, Buchanan writes:

"The first rudiments of education are usually given, both by Hindus and Muslims, in small schools called Pathshalas, under the tuition of teachers called Gurus, who may be of any caste or religion."[1]

We have similar accounts ragarding other districts of Bihar and Bengal.[2] The vernacular schools which were numerous both in the towns and rural areas directly influenced the character of the people. It cannot be denied that education in these schools suffered from serious drawbacks. Lack of adequate patronage, poverty of the people, non-availability of published books contributed to limit the scope of instruction to the elementary stage. But education given in them was essentially utilitarian, and was available to the humble sections of society as well.[3] Elementary education in the vernaculars, in commercial and agricultural accounts, was sufficiently developed to meet the requirements of society. In many schools of Bengal, Adam observed that there was "superior system of popular instruction preparatory . . . to the more enlarged course of learned study".[4] Buchanan informs us that in the Hindi schools of Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, students at a tender age recited even from the works of "Tulsidas, Kesavadas, Behari, etc.".[5] Of the district of Dinajpur, he writes that these schools equipped boys "for entering into an office as assistants, when from 8 to 10 years of age, according to their industry".[6] Malcolm tells us that in Central India, sufficient education was given to children in the art of writing business letters and keeping "clear

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 705.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 101-02, pp. 429-30; *III*, pp. 129-30.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 707-08. [4] Adam: *op. cit.*, p. 253.
[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 429-30. [6] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 707.

accounts". According to him, education in arithmetic was carried to "considerable perfection".[1]

The mode of instruction in these elementary vernacular schools does not appear to be defective when we take into account the limitations of that age. At an early age of five or six, children were taught reading and writing simultaneously and this appeared to Buchanan "an excellent method".[2] His remarks on the method of instruction deserve to be cited:

"They begin with tracing the letters on the floor with a pencil of steatite (Ram khori) . . . . In five or six months they are thus able to read and write. They then begin to write on . . . plantain leaves with a reed and ink, and at the same time they learn numeration, and the sub-divisions of weights and measures. The sub-divisions of time belong to astronomy or rather astrology. This occupies 18 months. They then begin to write on paper, to learn to keep accounts, and at the same time to multiply, divide and subtract, with the rule of practice, in which the usual Indian arithmetic consists. Accounts and arithmetic are divided into two kinds, one for agricultural, and the other for commercial affairs . . . . In general the parents of this country (Bengal) are contented with instructing their children in mercantile accounts."[3]

He further observes:

"The use of the sharp iron style, for writing on bark or leaf, although the original manner of Hindu writing has been entirely relinquished, and a pen made of reed or bamboo and ink introduced by the Muhammedans, are universally employed, even in writing on the palmira leaf, which is still often used in works of value, as being more durable than paper."[4]

According to Adam, the following were the four stages of instruction:

(a) Writing on the ground;
(b) Writing on the palm-leaf or the wooden board;
(c) Writing on the plantain leaf or the brazen plate.
(d) Writing on paper which was getting quite popular in the 19th century.[5]

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 193-94.
[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 707-08.
[3] *Ibid*, *II*, p. 706.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 707.
[5] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 232-33.

There were several grades of vernacular schools in Bengal in his day. At Murshidabad, there were 4 Hindi schools where commercial accounts were taught, 14 Bengali schools of agricultural accounts only, and 10 Bengali schools which tought both. Written works in the vernacular languages were taught in addition to these subjects. In some schools, an elementary instruction in Sanskrit was also given to students. The commercial accounts were chiefly studied by different classes of the business community, merchants, money-lenders, retail traders and so on. The other classes to whom land was the principal source of livelihood specialized in agricultural accounts.[1]

As late as 1834-35 when the indigenous institutions of education were decaying in the British territories, Adam wrote that there were about a lac of primary vernacular schools in Bengal and Bihar. According to him, the system of village schools was "extensively prevalent, that the desire to give education to their male children must be deeply seated in the minds of the parents even of the humblest classes", that these were the institutions "chiefly interwoven" with the habits and customs of the people.[2] He pays the following tribute to the elementary Bengali schools:

> "My recollections of the village schools of Scotland do not enable me to prononuce that the instruction given in them has a more direct bearing upon the daily interests of life than that which I find given, or professed to be given, in the humbler village schools of Bengal."[3]

We have sufficient data for the period in the writings of Buchanan to show that the elementary vernacular schools did not exclude the lower classes from acquiring education in the vernacular languages and arithmetic. About Bihar, he writes that the artisan classes of masons and stone-cutters, classified as *Sudras*, were quite literate, and they even studied Sanskrit books about their crafts.[4] In South India, he observed that the members of the different weaving classes were able "to read and write accounts, and letters on business". The lower classes of "oil-makers" and tradesmen were sufficiently literate in the verna-

[1] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 251-52.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 146.
[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 163.

cular languages. The Ladas of the *Sudra* caste were familiar even with the Sanskrit language.[1]

## *Centres of Higher Learning*

India was famous for her academic centres where teachers and taught sat together at the sacred altar of learning. We are told that the old traditions of scholarship, of zeal and passion for learning associated with the universities at Taksasila and Nalanda still survived in the country. In Northern India, at Varanasi, "seated on the Ganges in a beautiful situation" (mentioned by Bernier as "the Athens of India" in the 17th century[2]), retained its reputation as the highest centre of Hindu learning. To this city, Brahmans flocked from every corner of the land to dedicate their whole lives for gathering pebbles at the shore of learning. The author of *Araish-i-Mahfil* writes about it that it was the abode of the most learned among Brahmans—"instructors of the Vedas, knowers of the secrets of the Shastras, astrologers, astronomers, and learned men of every science".[3] Here the science of astronomy was carried to perfection by the Brahmans. Twining mentions *Surya Siddhanta* as an ancient Sanskrit treatise studied on the subject.[4] Forster bowed low before the serene majesty of the place and acknowledged that "in the early ages of the world", the Hindus were "one of the most enlightened and powerful nations that inhabited the earth". He has given the following description of the observatory at Varanasi:[5]

> "The observatory at Benares, though rude in its structure, and containing instruments suitably coarse, proves, notwithstanding, that the Hindoos possess the knowledge of ascertaining the motions of the heavenly bodies"

In Central India, Malcolm mentions Ujjain as a famous centre of Sanskrit studies.[6] In Bihar, Tirhut is described as a place of higher learning where many Mithila Brahmans were "teachers

[1] Buchanan: *op. cit., I*, p. 247, pp. 242-46, p. 422.
[2] Bernier: *op. cit*, p. 334. [3] *Araish-i-Mahfil*: pp. 67-8.
[4] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 457. [5] Forster: *op. cit., I*, p. 49. Twining writes that this observatory was constructed by Raja Jay Singh in the 8th century. Twining: *op cit.*, p. 325.
[6] Malcolm: *op. cit., II*, p. 191.

of very high celebrity".[1] In Bengal, Nadia was an ancient seat of Sanskrit learning. In the pre-British period, it was "Oxford of the Province", "the focus of intellectual development, the land of the Naiyakas who reasoned and argued on every considerable topic, the abode of astronomers, whose panjikas and almanacs still regulate the festivals and Pujas and the daily domestic concerns of the Hindus".[2] Under the patronage of Rani Bhabani, a contemporary of Sirajuddaula, Rajshahi acquired celebrity as a great centre of Sanskrit learning. In 1834-35, Adam counted 38 colleges of Sanskrit education in this district, 19 of Hindu Law, 13 of General Literature, 2 of Logic and 4 of *Vedanta, Tantric, Pauranic* and medical learning.[3]

The former seats of the Mughal governments were also famous centres of Islamic learning. In the United Province, Jaunpur continued to be a popular centre of Persian learning. It is described as "an abode of wisdom" where "the high road of learning" was still pursued. Maulvi Roshan Ali living at the close of the 18th century is spoken of as "the ornament of the Muhammedan religion", and it is emphasized that "many seekers of knowledge obtain gain from his bounty, and reach to the pitch of eloquence".[4] In the later part of the 18th century, Lucknow shot into prominence as the great centre of Persian culture and learning. The court of Safdar Jang and his successors patronized all the scholars who had to migrate from Delhi on account of political disturbances. They encouraged cultivation of higher knowledge in the Persian language and of sciences. The Imambara of Mirza Abu Talib Khan is mentioned as an old college, which produced many scholars highly versed in Persian and Arabic. The author of *Araish-i-Mahfil* remarks that "nowhere else are there wise men like those of that city, either Persian scholars or Arabic". The most renowned scholars belonging to the Sunni sect, living at the end of the 18th century, were Maulvi Mubir Sahib and Maulvi Syed Dildar Ali, whose profound learning was reflected in all their writings.[5] In the good old days of the Nawabs of Bengal, Azimabad (Patna) was a premier centre of

[1] Martin: *op. cit., III*, p. 136.
[2] *Calcutta Review 1872, IV*, p. 97 and pp. 103-04. see also. *XXV* pp. 114-16.
[3] Adam: *op. cit.*, pp. 175-83.
[4] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 71.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

Persian learning. Ghulam Hussain writes as follows in this context:

> "There were in those times at Azimabad a number of persons who loved science and learning and employed themselves in teaching and in being taught; and I remember to have seen in that city and its environs nine or ten professors of repute and three or four hundred students and disciples, from whence may be conjectured the number of those that must have been in the great towns or the retired districts. Amongst those that flourished in the town of Behar, the Kazi Gulam Muzaffar . . . was personally known to Allahvardi, who appointed him to the office of supreme judge of Murshidabd."[1]

He gives an account of many illustrious scholars who had come to India from Persia and settled in Behar and Azimabad. Here are the names of some of them—Mahomed-el-Medoo Bed Ali, Shah Mahmed Hussain, Sayyid Mahmed Ali, Haji Bediuddin.[2] From these stray references, it is not difficult to realize that higher scholarship was valued and cultivated in society as a great cultural accomplishment.

## *Organization of Education*

In the 18th century, there was nothing like an integrated system of education under State control or direction. The academies of Sanskrit, and schools of Persian and vernacular instruction were distinct classes of institutions. They were generally maintained on endowments in land or contributions of the wealthy classes. The higher Sanskrit schools are mentioned as run by Brahman Pandits or *Adhyapaks* who gave education on the lines of a private coaching institute. They furnished their schools, maintained them and prescribed courses of instruction. In Bihar, their schools were generally called *Dharamshalas*[3] and in Dinajpur, in Bengal, *Chaubari* was a popular term for them.[4] Where the Brahman teachers had large endowments in lands as in the latter district, they gave free instruction and even maintained their students. Buchanan pays a tribute to the magnanimity of these Brahman teachers whose ancestors had

[1] *Seir-Mutaqherin*, *II*, p. 175.
[2] *Ibid.*, *II*, pp. 175–85.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 134.
[4] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 713.

procured for their families charity lands and who were under no moral obligation to continue the work of instruction. They could "betake themselves to the degrading affairs of the world, without forfeiting this property". He, however, writes:

> "Very much, however, to the conduct of the Brahmans, such a neglect is not usual, and one son of the family continues generally to profess the instruction of youth."[1]

Under the British rule the rapacity of the new class of landowners, their encroachments on the hereditary grants of Brahman families, was putting to an end many private academies of Sanskrit learning.[2] Another principal source of income to the Brahman teachers and their students were the charities and gifts of the wealthy classes. They were invited by the people on occasions of religious and social ceremonies and honoured with gifts in cash and kind.[3] Buchanan, however, tells us that in Bihar the "sages" instructing the youth made "much less profit than the priest, who performed the ceremonies". The result was that the work of education was being neglected.[4] The low emoluments of the professors of Sanskrit were injuring the interest of education and learning in the country.[5] The charities and gifts were certainly a precarious support to education, but the system continued to be the mainstay of education even in the later period. The remarks of Adam in this connection deserve to be noted:

> "The custom of inviting learned men on the occasion of funeral obsequies, marriages, festivals, etc., and at such times of bestowing gifts on them proportioned in value and amount to the estimation in which they are held as teachers, is general amongst those Hindus who are of sufficiently pure caste to be considered worthy of the association of the Brahmans."[6]
>
> "When a teacher of learning receives such an invitation . . . he generally takes one or two of his pupils with him, giving each pupil his turn of such an advantage in due course."[7]

Devotion to education and learning were, however, prized to the extent that even begging of alms was not considered a

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, p. 712.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.* see also Adam: *op. cit.*, p. 107
[4] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 163.
[5] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 505.
[6] Adam: *op. cit.*, p. 173.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 174.

humiliation for them.[1] In the vernacular schools we are informed that the students were taught recitations to elicit donations for their teachers from house to house as *Guru-dakshina*.[2]

The Persian schools also subsisted on endowments and many teachers enjoying these grants are mentioned by Buchanan in Bihar and Bengal as giving free education.[3] Many *Maulvis* taught almost gratuitously and reputation was their only reward. Their students were expected to honour them with "presents under the name of Rateb", when they finished their education and settled in life.[4] The system of private tuition or domestic instruction was also popular in the higher strata, and teachers were permitted to add to their income by coaching other students as well.[5]

The vernacular schools appear slightly to be on a different footing. No endowments of permanent character are mentioned. In the cities of Bengal, they were generally located in the houses of rich and respectable people and the private tutors of the families were permitted to give education to children of neighbourhood. In rural areas, they were maintained by the village community and contributions from the rich people. The *Pathshalas*, equivalent to grammar school, were usually the huts built outside the village. In those areas where sugarcane was largely grown, Buchanan writes, in England the "boiling houses" also served the purpose.[6] The emoluments of teachers in these schools mostly depended upon fees and contributions realized from students but were so low as to discourage men of high calibre and talents from entering the profession. Here is a description of an elementary Hindi school in a district of Bengal:

> "The master furnishes the *Pathshala* or school house, and each boy gives one anna, and from five to seven seers of grain a month. Each school may be attended by five to thirty boys; but in some places they attend only during the rainy season."[7]

In his account about the district of Dinajpur, Bengal, Buchanan writes that the teachers of elementary vernacular schools

[1] Adam: *op. cit.*, p. 107. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 233.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 105; *III*, 504-05. [4] *Ibid.*
[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 484, *II*, p, 705, *III*, p. 504.
[6] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 129. [7] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 482.

were "poorly rewarded", "little respected", and "quite different from the proper Guru or teacher of religion". He remarks:

> "There is no public provision for these useful members of society, and they depend entirely on their scholars for a subsistence. In the towns of Denajpoor, and Maldah, indeed, the average number of scholars to each master may be about 20, and the fees are from four to eight annas a month, according to the progress the children have made; on an average the fees may be six annas for each, or seven and a half rupees for twenty scholars, which in this district is a decent income; but in country places the average number of scholars does not exceed twelve, and the fees are from one to four annas a month, or on an average two and a half, so that the whole average income is only one rupee fourteen annas."[1]

The remunerations of teachers of Persian engaged in private tuition do not also appear to be materially higher. In Rangpur, in Bengal, when they were employed by wealthy persons, they were paid "from 5 to 12 rupees a month". They were of course allowed to teach one or two children of other families who paid them from one half to two rupees a month.[2]

AVERAGE REMUNERATION OF TEACHERS[3]

| | | Rs. | As. | Ps. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | In the district of Murshidabad | 4 | 12 | 9 |
| 2. | ,, ,, Birbhum | 3 | 3 | 9 |
| 3. | ,, ,, Burdwan | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| 4. | ,, ,, South Bihar | 2 | 0 | 10 |
| 5. | ,, ,, Tirhut | 1 | 8 | 7 |

The average remunerations of Brahman teachers in the Sanskrit schools and the teachers of Persian and Arabic too were not substantially higher. The average remuneration of Brahman teachers in Bengal and Bihar was about Rs. 53-8-0[4] per annum. The emoluments of Persian and Arabic teachers were about Rs. 6 per month.[5] These figures, however, apply to a period in which education on account of the lack of due patronage was languishing in the British territories.

The ages at which children were put to schools make an

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 705. [2] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 504.
[3] Adam: *op. cit.*, p. 249. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 258, 261. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 278, 280.

interesting study. About the district of Shahabad, Bihar, Buchanan writes that children were put into the vernacular schools usually at the age of six and the duration of the period of instruction was four years.[1] About the district of Dinajpur, he says that boys usually entered the Sanskrit school at twelve years of age after finishing their instruction in the elementary vernacular school.[2] In the district of Rangpur, children began to learn Persian when they were "from five to seven years of age, and usually employ ten years in its study".[3]

An idea of literacy in society can be had from the investigations of Buchanan prior to 1810 relating to the district of Purneah towards Bengal:[4]

STATISTICAL TABLE GIVING POPULATION AND NUMBERS OF TEACHERS

| *Population* | *No. of teachers of vernacular schools* | *Teachers of Persian and Arabic schools* | *Sanskrit teachers* | *Total No. of teachers* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2,904.380 | | 66 | 643 | 828 |

STATISTICAL TABLE GIVING THE STATE OF LITERACY

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| i. | Men capable of keeping common accounts | | 18,650 |
| ii. | Men who could sign their name | | 16,505 |
| iii. | Men who could understand the common poetry | | 1,830 |
| iv. | Women who could understand the common poetry | | 488 |
| | | | 37,473 |
| | Add the No. of teachers 828 | Total | 38,301 |

Roughly speaking, in this district more than 13% of the people could be considered literate. This estimate does not compare unfavourably with the literacy figures of the later British period. In the 18th century when the State was almost indifferent to the cause of popular education, when the handicaps to learning were many, the average calculations made by Buchanan are not disappointing. In regard to education, the 18th century retained its medieval character. We are informed that writing was chiefly done on palm leaves or stripes of cloth, and letters were stencilled on them by an iron pen resembling a "butcher's steel".[5]

[1] Martin: *op. cit., I*, pp. 481-82.
[2] *Ibid., II*, p. 713
[3] *Ibid., III*, p. 504.
[4] *Ibid., III*, Appendices.
[5] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 51. Wilks: *op. cit., I*, p. xii, footnote.

## *Female Education*

All accounts emphasize that Indian society made no suitable provision of public instruction for girls. "There are no schools for females in Central India", says Malcolm, "such institutions being quite incompatible with the prejudices and usages of the natives: education among women is therefore rare"[1]. He, however, informs us that the ladies of the Rajput aristocracy received sufficient private education to carry on correspondence and that the dancing girls were also "well instructed".[2] In India, acquisition of learning by women was certainly a rare privilege but an assertion in support of universal female illiteracy is hardly tenable. In the upper strata the system of domestic instruction of girls was quite popular. We have the following testimony of Craufurd in this connection:

> "The girls receive their instruction under the eye of their parents, which seldom consists in anything but the duties prescribed to them by their religion."[3]

Buchanan says that in his survey of East India Company's possessions in Northern India, he did not come across any public institution for female education, as popular prejudices were strongly entrenched against it. But he informs us that the ladies of "the high-born chiefs" could generally read and write. In the district of Bihar, he learnt that many women of Khattri, Brahman and *Kayastha* castes, which had migrated from the western parts of India, could read and write in the vernacular languages.[4] In many accounts we also come across some illustrious names of women who will do honour to any civilized society. Ahilya Bai, daughter-in-law of the founder of Holkar family, is still adored in every home in Central India for her unbounded generosity and remarkable administrative ability. From 1755 to 1795 she ruled the dominions of the Holkar House at Indore with an ability and success which appear amazing.[5] We have already cited the name of Rani Bhabani in connection with her liberal patronage of Sanskrit education in Rajshahi. Here is an account of the Begum of Alivardi Khan by Holwell:

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 192. [2] *Ibid.* p. 193.
[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 258-59.
[4] Martin: *op. cit. I*, 132, 484; *II*, p. 434.
[5] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 190-91.

> "A woman, whose wisdom, magnanimity, benevolence, and every amiable quality reflected high honour on her sex and station, much influenced the usurper's councils, and was consulted by him in every material movement in the state . . . ."[1]

Begum Samru was another lady of many accomplishments. Twining writes about her:

> "This eastern Clorinde was no less distinguished by her prowess in the field. It is strange to see a woman's arm sustaining the falling Empire of the Mongols."[2]

A society where illiteracy was the fate of all women could not certainly boast of such distinguished personalities.

In India, Dubois rightly stresses that in India learning was cultivated from very early times but in the 18th century people had fallen from the heights of their ancestors.[3] Still education was not neglected and there is sound evidence of laudable private enterprise in this sphere. There were certainly no public examinations and award of degrees on modern lines but learning was patronized by the princes and wealthy persons. It was valued as a high cultural accomplishment. Among the Hindus, the Brahmans are mentioned as a highly learned group and their knowledge of Sanskrit literature and sciences established their intellectual superiority over the rest of the people. In the Muslim society the religious classes were likewise devoted to education and constituted the intelligentsia. In the period under review, the decline of the Muslim rule was, however. injurious to the cause of education in the Persian and Arabic languages.

[1] Holwell: *Interesting Historical Events, I*, pp. 170-71. She advised Sirajuddaula "that if he persisted (against the English), his rashness and injustice would not be the cause of his own death, but the total ruin of his family." *Ibid.*, p. 176.

[2] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 263-64.

[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 380.

*Chapter Six*

# General Life in Society

IT IS NOT possible to give a comprehensive account of the general life of the people of different classes in the 18th century Contemporary European sources throw light only on those aspects which were quite conspicuous and were more or less peculiar to Indian society. A study of these reveals that the Indian people were not complete strangers to comfortable existence. The opinion generally held abroad that they knew only to honour the ascetic and thought of the world as an illusion is not without an element of truth but this seemingly other-worldly outlook did not deter them from taking active interest in the material pursuits of life. The sweeping denunciations of the mode of daily life in India in many missionary accounts of the early 19th century too are not warranted by actual facts.

## *Mode of Daily Life*

To Europeans, the routine of daily life in Indian society appeared very much embarrassing. They considered it as "a studied deviation from the ordinary purposes and convenience of human life," as the product of "a malignant genius".[1] They could not appreciate the numerous considerations of internal and external purity which regulated it. The various rules of cleanliness and hygiene valued by the people, their notions regarding clean or unclean food, drinks and other objects failed to impress the foreign mind. From Dubois, we have an account of the rules and routine of daily life of the Hindus of the 18th century. He says that the Hindus had an elaborate treatise on the subject, and he quotes profusely from *Nittia-Karma*, a great book of Brahmanical ritual dealing with the rules of conduct in the various stages of

1 *Asiatic Annual Register for the Year 1799:* Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 122. Bolts: *Considerations on Indian Affairs*, p. 2. Tennant: *op. cit.*, pp. 142-62; Orme: *op cit.*, *I*, pp. 2-7.

life, and those relating to ablutions, eating, sleeping, cleansing the teeth, prayers and ceremonies for different occasions.[1] We shall briefly deal with the governing influences in this respect.

### *External Cleanliness*

According to Dubois, cleanliness was the predominating idea of "every action of life" and general conduct of the Hindus. The Brahmans, who were very strict in this respect, were at an early age taught to practise the customs and manners regulating their daily conduct in society.[2] The society recognized innumerable external rules of purity which necessitated purifications of the body. Contact with unclean objects such as the human corpse, various animals, especially dogs, women during childbirth, menses, unclean earthenware, leather and skins, etc., was held to pollute the body and required to be purified by ablutions and ceremonies. We are informed that after the funeral ceremony was over, all those who assisted in it purified themselves by bathing in clean waters. The moment a Hindu had breathed his last, the preparations for his funeral commenced. So long as the dead body remained inside the house, the members of the family and even people of the neighbourhood could not attend to their normal duties.[3] The mother of a newly-born child was segregated in the household for about a month and was not allowed to touch the vessels and furniture. On the expiry of this period, she performed necessary ceremonies of purification and then resumed her normal duties. During menses she was likewise isolated. Dubois says that for these menstrual periods, there was "a sort of gynaeceum set apart for them" in the houses of the upper strata. In the lower class, in whose huts there was no such accommodation, "the women are turned out into the street, under a sort of shed or outhouse, or else they are allowed a corner of the cow-shed".[4] Craufurd also informs us that she was segregated in separate apartments.[5] When the so-called unclean period was over, all her garments were washed and her dirty clothes were not

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 238-70.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 181.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 181-82
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 182-83.
[5] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 259.

"allowed inside the house".[1] Earthen ware were considered pure only so long as they were not used, "but from the moment they have contained water, they can be only used by the person who filled them". The Brahmans were very fastidious about these rules and it is mentioned that they kept the doors of their kitchens always closed "lest some profane and unclean person should cast an eye on the earthen ware inside, which, rendered unclean by that one look, would be only fit to be immediately broken to pieces. It is to avoid the risk of a similar disaster that their women never draw water in earthen vessels, but always use those made of brass and copper".[2]

The account of Dubois regarding these aspects of daily life appears to be exaggerated. It is, however, clear that among Hindus in the upper strata, the rules relating to cleanliness were strictly observed. For like reasons, the use of silken clothes was preferred to that of cotton among the well-to-do classes. Physical contact with persons engaged in low unclean professions and even Europeans whose mode of life was odious to the people here was required to be avoided as far as possible. In fact contact with anything which could defile their body, clothes, furniture and temples was avoided.[3] According to Robert Orme, the dread of impurity and pollution pervaded the entire social code of the Hindus and his comments in this connection are very slashing.[4] Amongst animals, dogs were considered very unclean and the Hindus of higher castes carefully avoided "the familiar caresses of these faithful companions of man".[5] Leather and skins of different kinds excepting those of the tiger and antelope were considered "particularly unclean". The high-caste Hindus would not touch with their hands even their slippers or sandals, and when they rode out, they covered the leather saddlery with cloth.[6] The use of "boots, gloves, or leather breeches" was out of the question altogether.[7] This also accounts for their "strong aversion to wind instruments of music".[8] For hygienic reasons, they objected to practices like spitting on the floor of rooms, as well as urination in the standing posture. These were considered as serious breaches

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 183.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 183-84.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 184.
[4] Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 2-7.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.* p. 187.
[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 184-85.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

of the rules of social propriety.[1] In these respects, Hinduism was exerting its influence on other religious communities also. We may not exaggerate if we say that throughout India, the command of Moses—"Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standeth is holy ground"—was scrupulously observed by Hindus and Muslims alike before they entered their sacred temples, mosques and other places of religious sanctity like tombs and Imambaras.[2] Ali informs us that Muslims did not bury the dead in the vicinity of a mosque which was "too sacred to be allowed the pollution". "Anyone having touched a dead body", she writes, "must bathe prior to entering the mosque, or performing their usual prayer service at home; such is the veneration they entertain for the name of God".[3] The Hindus were all the more strict, so much so that at no place in the Peninsula, Buchanan says, even Europeans could get admission into the temples of high castes.[4]

In Indian society, ablutions were a very vital part of the daily life as they were considered vital for bodily cleanliness. Taking bath once a day was considered absolutely necessary for everyone. Brahmans bathed even "three times a day". Certain rivers and tanks were very popular as places of public baths everywhere, and at the banks of these could be seen hundreds of men and women every morning annointing themselves with oil prior to bathing.[5] Forbes writes of public "Hummums" at Surat "where oils, perfumes, and pastes are provided for annointing the visitors".[6] Captain Williamson writes of people in general as follows:

> "With respect to religious ablutions, the natives of every sect, especially the Brahmins, are particular even to fastidiousness. They all bathed daily, at least once before dinner, and in all weathers, repairing for that purpose either to some neighbouring river, or to a pond (or tank). There they walk in the water up to their waists, and placing their thumbs in their ears, and their forefingers pressing their nostrils, immerse themselves several times in succession, by squatting sud-

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, see also Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 212-13.
[2] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 75. Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 229. Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 48-9.
[3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 32, also p. 152.
[4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 82.
[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 188.
[6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 156.

denly upon their haunches, generally repeating various prayers on these occasions."[1]

He also informs us that in "the several great cities throughout the East", there were *Hummums* or tanks of public bathing where experts were available to give the body delicate massage, a luxury which people liked very much.[2] According to Ives, the religion of the Hindus enjoined "much bodily purification; and therefore the first thing they do in the morning is to go down to the riverside and wash, and afterwards to say their prayers on the banks".[3] Both among the Muslims and the Hindus, ablutions before prayers and performance of religious ceremonies were absolutely necessary.[4] "The ablutions strongly enforced in the Hindoo religion are wise injunctions," says Forbes, as bathing was "the most refreshing pleasure in a hot climate". Moreover, in Indian society purity of body was "supposed to be nearly connected with purity of soul".[5] Dubois goes to the extent of asserting that the Hindus were very strict regarding the external cleanliness of their body though they were "fairly tolerant so far as the actual dogmas of their religion are concerned". While he was in India, he lived according to their rules, with a view to cultivating intimacy with them. He strongly recommends that course of life to Europeans in India, at least "for the good of their health", if for no other good.[6] The rigour of the *Chauka* system among the Hindus, their strictness regarding the manner and material of their food and drinks, was the result of their passion for external and internal cleanliness. The high castes did not use plates or dishes at their meals, not even china and earthen vessels. The use of spoons and forks was also forbidden. "To offer a Brahmin food on a metal plate which someone had already used," says Dubois, "would be considered a deadly insult." They took their food with their fingers taking all possible care not to smear them with their saliva.[7] Contact with saliva of others was considered very objectionable. He cites an interesting case in which a European, giving a letter of introduction to a Brahman, offended his suscep-

1 Williamson: *op. cit.*, p. 204.
2 *Ibid.*, pp. 205-06.
3 Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 48.
4 Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 153.
5 Forbes: *op. cit. I*, p. 522.
6 Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 204.
7 *Ibid.*, pp. 185-86

tibility by handing him the letter after sealing it "with a wafer, which he moisted by placing it on the tip of his tongue". The Brahman left the place in anger, "grievously insulted" as he could not tolerate to be "the bearer of a missive that has been thus defiled".[1]

## *Internal Cleanliness*

The notion of internal purity was also a strong influence on the daily life of people. In the tropical climate of the country, many precautions and preventive measures were necessary against periodic diseases and epidemics, and for general considerations of health. Man was required to guard himself from internal uncleanliness which "insinuate themselves into the body, and which can only be got rid of by proper methods ordained by rule and custom".[2] Society severely discouraged the use of intoxicants and the Brahmans of South India had "invincible repugnance to the liquor" distilled or undistilled. This also applies to the upper classes of the Hindus in general, as is borne out by the following statement of Dubois:

> "As a rule, a respectable Hindu will not touch spirits or any intoxicating drinks considering that they cause one of the greatest internal defilements that it is possible to contract."[3]

The only permissible drinks were simple water, syrups, and "curdled milk diluted with water".[4] For similar reasons the use of meat was not very popular and in the South, Brahmans abstained even from "eggs of all sorts".[5] These rules of abstinence were observed by almost all the enlightened sections of the population, excepting the lower strata, where they were little understood. Dubois writes that in South India people of many high *Sudra* classes also acted on these rules and avoided the eating of flesh.[6] In these respects the life of Brahmans was very strict and they generally avoided three things—meat, liquors and food prepared by persons of another caste. Their "self-denials,

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 187.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 189.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 190.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 189-90.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 191. He writes how a Brahman on seeing "some eggs being broken and beaten up for an omelette, immediately complained of feeling unwell, and in the course of a few moments was violently sick. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 192.

their fasts", their religious duties and rule of life were all "intolerably severe", and were "looked upon in the light of pastimes".[1] To the foreigners such a mode of life appeared to be innocuous and intolerable. It is, however, not difficult to see that the notions of defilements discussed above dictated habits of cleanliness and sobriety.

## *Food and Drinks*

Of Indian diet in the period the first thing to note is the variety and richness of taste. The public dinners of the aristocracy were characterized by an extreme variety of dishes too tedious to be mentioned.[2] The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* gives a long list of innumerable preparations of rice, sugar, meat, etc., used in the Muslim families. *Polao* and *Kabab-Polao* of different varieties, breads, both leavened and unleavened, many preparations of rice were very popular.[3] Foreign observers have especially commented on the elaborate cooking of the Muslims. The curries of meat used in their upper strata were highly seasoned with spices and by the liberal use of clarified butter, while the vegetable dishes of the Hindus made by the use of turmeric and tamarinds were equally tasteful.[4] Grose mentions that among Muslims at Surat, rice was usually eaten along with sauces made of fish, flesh or fowl, "high-seasoned savoury", and was considered light, cooling and at the same time wholesome. They were also very fond of meat and curries, *Polao* and *Kitcharee*.[5] According to him "they reckoned kitcharee very wholesome food and took it with salt, fish, butter and pickles which they called achars". They also feasted themselves with avidity on "roasted fowl or small calf as a whole and filled its stomach with something".[6] However, roasted meat does not appear to be very popular. Ali writes of the Muslim gentry at Lucknow who roasted or boiled "joints" that were "never seen at the dinner of a native; that a leg of mutton or sirlosin of beef would place the hostess under all sorts of difficulties, where knives and forks are not understood to be amongst the useful appendages of a meal". She further informs us:

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 277.
[2] Doyley: *op. cit.*, xx.
[3] *Qanoon-i-Islam:* Appendix v.
[4] Heyne: *Tracts*, *p.* 294.
[5] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 149-50.
[6] *Ibid.*. p. 150.

"The only thing in the shape of roast meats are small lean cutlets, bruised, seasoned and cemented with pounded poppy-seed, several being fastened together on skewers; they are grilled or roasted over a charcoal fire spread on the ground, and then called Keebaub, which word implies roast meat."

She has mentioned rice as the chief foodgrain of the upper classes, and stews and curries as the chief preparations of a Muslim kitchen. She confesses that the variety of dishes was countless.[1] Twining speaks highly of the deliciousness of the food of the upper classes. The curries and various other dishes served to him from the kitchen of the Nawab of Murshidabad were very tasteful. The curry in particular was the most delicious he had ever tasted in his life.[2]

Forbes has given an interesting account of a supper at the palace of the Nawab of Cambay. It was preceded by an entertainment of music during which "the attendants frequently brought dried fruits, pistachio-nuts, and salted almonds, to improve the flavour of the coffee and sherbuts made from the pieces of falsee, limes and different fruits". While these were being served, a band of servants stood behind the guests, seated on their carpets, smoking their "culloons and nargills", displaying taste for music and poetry in their conversation, lightly moving "punkahs and chowries". About 10 p.m. all descended from the "terrace to the saloon" for supper. This room was "covered with rich carpets, cushions, and pillows of various kinds, illuminated from cut-glass chandeliers, and ornamented with Persian paintings, representing the youths and damsels of Iran in voluptuous indulgence". The supper consisted of "a great variety of the repast, pillaus, curries, kebabs, savoury dishes, mixed with rice the principal grain of the higher castes in Hindostan . . . venison, pea-fowl, kid, poultry, and game". It was extremely flavoury. "Some of the pillaus appeared to me extremely curious", says he, "and were the first I had seen at any oriental entertainments". The drinks offered to the guests were water and a variety of sherbuts. It was only in privacy, he says, that the Mughal and Persian nobility did not object to liquors.[3]

[1] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp 324-25.
[2] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 108-09.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit. II*, pp. 173-74.

The Hindu cooking on the whole was plain and simple, but spices were lavishly used. Grose writes that the rich Hindu merchants of the Western Peninsula ate rice and curries highly seasoned, with the result that "they smell exceedingly strong of it (Hing), not only at the mouth, but from its perspiration through every pore".[1] Sweetmeats were also in great favour with the people. The author of *Sujan-Charitra* mentions an endless variety of them plundered from the shops of Delhi by the turbulent Jat soldiery of Bharatpur.[2] Of Hindus on the Western Coast, we learn that they "in general are fond of sweetmeats and confectionery and have an infinite variety or forms of them", some of which appeared very delicious to Europeans.[3] The taste for sweet drinks was also widespread in society as Forbes writes that "perfumed and spiced sherbuts" were "much esteemed in the East for the palate".[4] Twining also mentions that in a grand breakfast party given by the Nawab of Oudh at Lucknow in 1794 in a tent, the table was covered, besides coffee, fish, curries, "with a profusion of sweetmeats and flowers".[5]

No generalizations can be made regarding the character of the diet of people of different strata in various parts of the country. It was very much influenced by local conditions and productions. In Bengal, all ate fish, rice, curd, fruits and sweetmeats from, the high to the low, and made liberal use of mustard oil, which appeared a shabby diet to the author of *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, because mutton, bread of wheat and clarified butter did not agree with the Bengali constitution.[6] So far as the non-vegetarian diet is concerned, the tastes for dishes varied from place to place. On coastal areas, fish was a cheap and common article of food on account of its easy availability. Grose writes about the efficacy of fish diet for multiplication of species, and he says that in the villages of fishermen towards the Western Coast, the birth-rate was very high. They "were constantly swarming with children, beyond what could be anywhere else seen".[7] With the lower castes in South India, "fowl" was a common article of diet, while in

[1] Grose: *op. cit.*, pp. 235-36.

[2] Sudan: *Sujan-Charitra*, *Nagri Pracharini*, pp. 175-78.

[3] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 238.

[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 469.

[5] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 167-68.

[6] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*: p. 24.

[7] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 239.

Bengal, its use was solely confined to the Muslims. The Hindus of lower strata in Bengal used ducks and geese; in the South these birds were domesticated only by Europeans.[1]

Among Hindus, the items of food differed even from caste to caste. The Brahmans, on the whole, were inclined towards purely vegetarian diet consisting of milk, fruits, vegetables, but the Rajputs ate venison, mutton, fish as well.[2] However, in the 18th century, meat diet was not a social taboo with the large part of the Hindu population. The non-Brahman population of Maharashtra and Southern India feasted on meat without scruple, and mutton, fish and fowl were eaten without any qualms of conscience.[3] In Bengal the Brahmans also ate fish.[4] In the district of Rangpur, they allowed themselves "many liberties in eating", many using "castrated goats" which were not fit for sacrifice.[5] In Northern India, at many places people professing the Vishnu cult are represented by Buchanan as strictly orthodox and vegetarian. At Gorakhpur, in Uttar Pradesh, Rajputs, Kayasthas, *Vaisyas*, Kurmis, Ahirs, etc., avoided meat while their brethren in the district of Purneah in Bengal ate the flesh of goats and pigeons offered in sacrifice. The low castes ate meat, almost indiscriminately, of goats, deer, hares, porcupines, partridges, quails, tortoise, fish, fowl and buffalo. The lowest among the low castes even ate the flesh of jackals and serpents.[6] Such contrasts appear all the more striking when we observe that in the same locality people of some high castes rejected the use of onions and garlic but ate meat.[7]

We have already mentioned that the type of food eaten had considerable caste significance. The diet of the people including meat was rigidly governed by caste conventions and customs. Religion banned the use of some items, such as beef, to the Hindus and pork to the Muslims. Only among the very dregs of society were these religious injunctions violated. The cow was an object of profound veneration and nothing could tempt a Hindu to taste its flesh. Ives quotes a belief popular among the Hindus that eating beef was like eating the flesh of parents.[8]

[1] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 315-16.
[2] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 413.
[4] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 40, footnote.
[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 553.
[6] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 473; *III*, p. 163.
[7] *Ibid.*, *III.*, p. 491.
[8] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 47.

Forbes mentions that palanquin-bearers in Gujarat objected to the carrying of beef by Europeans.[1] In South India, Dubois writes that the beggars and very low-caste devotees of Vaishnavite sects alone were notorious for their intemperance in eating and drinking. For their want of sobriety, the upper classes looked down on them with utter contempt.[2] Craufurd also says that even Hindu dancing-women who ate meat "of any kind" and drank liquors abstained from beef.[3]

The European accounts on the whole stress the sobriety and temperance of the Indian people. They usually ate twice a day, morning and evening.[4] Robert Orme remarks that the life of the Hindus in general was one of "great temperance". They made "very sparing use of animal food" and abstained from intoxicating liquors. Their diet was chiefly rice and vegetables dressed with spices, both of which grew abundantly in their gardens.[5] On the whole the members of the Brahman and *Vaisya* castes abstained from non-vegetarian diet, and lived mostly on rice, bread, ghee, milk, curd, fruits, vegetables and spices.[6] Forbes writes that in Gujarat many Brahmans, engaged in sacred practices, denied themselves the use of grains altogether, and subsisted on the preparations of cow's milk.[7] The diet of others generally consisted of "seasoned bread, rice, curry, vegetables, pickles, and sometimes a dessert."[8] As regards food, their life in the South was more austere than of their brethren in the North. Towards the Punjab, unlike them, they frequently ate meat.[9] The *Vaisyas* were strictly vegetarians. It is mentioned that those of Cambay ate nothing that was red "for fear there should be blood in it".[10] At Surat and Bombay they ate no flesh and drank no "spirituous liquors".[11] Ives writes strongly in

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 69. p. 414.
[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 114.
[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 289.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 281.
[5] Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 5
[6] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 112-13. Grose *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 235-36.
[7] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 51.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 346-47.
[9] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 284. Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xii.
[10] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 280.
[11] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 235-36.

support of the abstemious tastes of the people of Indian society in general.[1]

We, however, come across certain accounts in which certain classes have been condemned for excessive gluttony. With the Brahman priests, says Heyne, it was "a mortal sin to leave even a grain of rice that has once been placed before them".[2] Others also charge them with greed for food.[3] These people formed their views on stories popular about them in society. Ives also writes how certain rich people took pains at getting corpulent by living "most luxuriously" and sleeping in day-time "in a swinging cot" gently moved by their servants "whose business is also at stated times to awaken the master, merely to give him an opportunity of swallowing half a pint or more of liquid butter or ghee". According to him, corpulence was considered in Indian society "amongst the peculiar favours of heaven".[4] His remarks are corroborated by Grose who writes that "the Hindus desired corpulence and which they imagine adds to the dignity of their port . . . . To compass this, some of them will drink every day large quantities of ghee".[5] Undoubtedly ghee, butter and milk were the most favoured items of Indian diet, and people were conscious of their nutritive value.

## *Use of Intoxicants*

Contrary to the general assertions of his countrymen, Heyne makes a misleading statement that the "common Hindus are very fond of spirituous liquors: even the women will take a glass of brandy when offered by an European".[6] His statement is true only of the very lowest among the low castes, dregs of society whose members condescended to serve as the domestic servants of Europeans. Dubois describes them as the very scum

[1] Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 47-8. He quotes an interesting evidence in this context: "One strong evidence of the temperance of these people (Bengalies) is their hands, which, if touched by chance, you will be sure to find very cold, even in the middle of the hottest day; while the hands of Europeans are burning with an excessive heat, partly the effect perhaps of our intemperate way of living." *Ibid.*

[2] Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 122.

[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 274-75. Broughton: *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[4] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 35, footnote.

[5] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 235.

[6] Heyne: *op.cit.*, p. 325.

of society "vicious and unprincipled".[1] In the 18th century it was neither possible nor permissible for the caste-Hindus to drink from a vessel touched by a Muslim or a European, nay, not with any one of a different caste.[2] The use of intoxicants, liquors and soporific drugs was popular only with the lower strata. Writing of Bengal, Stavorinus says that the Hindus strongly objected to the use of inebriating substances. The pleasures of intoxication were considered degrading and beastly. Only those of the very lowest castes "sometimes exceed the bounds of intemperance".[3] Among Muslims, the religious laws banned the use of liquors and only "secret indulgence in wine and spirits" was possible.[4] Ali writes that as late as the beginning of the 19th centnry, the Muslim gentry at Lucknow did not think of wine and strong "liquids" and was content with amusements of "feasting, music and dancing women".[5] About the higher classes of Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat and the Western Peninsula, Forbes writes that they abstained from liquor.[6] Of course, the lower classes were "less abstemious" and opium was used by the members of the armed forces.[7] Elphinstone reports on the people under the Peshwas that drunkenness, the social vice of the lower classes under the British Government, was "almost unknown in the Mahratha country, which has thence a decided superiority in morals over the old Provinces". The sale of spirituous liquors, too, was discouraged by the Indian government.[8]

By the 19th century, in the northern territories of the East India Company the old shackles of public opinion had considerably relaxed and there was consequently greater laxity in the morals of the people. Buchanan writes that the tax on fermented and distilled liquors was very productive to the Company's government, that the use of narcotic drugs like opium, *Ganja*, *Bhang*, *Charas*, liquor, etc., was widespread in the lower strata.[9] He mentions that at many places even the people of higher classes drank spirituous liquors openly and did not lose

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 54. [2] Stavorinus. *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 454-55
[3] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 476. [4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 69
[5] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 194-95. [6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 63.
[7] *Ibid.* [8] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 74.
[9] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 122-23; *II*, p. 97. 100, 742; *III*, pp. 114, 483.

their caste.[1] The votaries of the Shakti cult, particularly of the god Bhairav, are mentioned as drinking liquor during worship secretly and many of these were Brahmans.[2] However, at places like Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh where the British rule had been recently imposed, indulgence in intoxicants was not so marked and the gentry "entirely disclaim the honour of good fellowship".[3] There is no doubt that under the Western influences this abuse was growing in the society, though "even the most abandoned drunkards among the natives" never became "outrageous" to the extent of disturbing the peace of the locality.[4] Even among "the lowest rabble" of Indian society one could "never witness anything approaching those shocking scenes of scandal", that "total disregard of decency and decorum, which are daily exhibited in ale-houses and gin shops in England, and in cabarets and gargotes in France".[5] The social intercourse of Indian people was very much unlike that of Europeans whose assemblis "in the midst of cups" degenerated "into the most disgusting scenes of confusion, and often terminate in quarrels and fighting".[6]

## *Use of Tobacco and Betels*

The popular luxuries of the people mentioned in foreign accounts were the use of tobacco, betels and smoking. The hubble-bubble was in universal use, and offering it to the guest, says Ali, was a mark of honour duly appreciated.[7] We learn that the rich people engaged the services of experts for preparing fragrant tobacco and furnishing the *Hooka* (hubble-bubble) filled with rosewater. The Europeans in India, too, were very much fond of it.[8] In 1769, Stavorinus writes that at a dinner in honour of a Dutch Director in Bengal, hubble-bubbles were placed before each of the company.[9] On his arrival in Calcutta in 1778, William Hickey was told that smoking the *Hooka* was very popular and widespread in Ango-Indian society.[10]

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 162; *III*, p. 163. [2] *Ibid. II*, *p.* 473; *III*, pp. 113-14, 553.
[3] *Ibid. II*, p. 424. [4] *Ibid. III*, p. 113. [5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 158.
[6] *Ibid.* pp. 156-57.
[7] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 333-34. [8] Doyley: *op. cit.*
[9] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 145. [10] Hickey, *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 136.

These *Hookas* were of different designs and names. *Goorgoori* was the small *Hooka* popular at Calcutta, *Nargills* at Surat, *Culloons* at Cambay. The *Kalyan* was one with a large bottom. Eliza Sterne mentions a few names while writing about her brother-in-law "who will suck a hubble-bubble, draw an Ailloon, smoke a *Hooka* or cream-can with you if you please".[1] As late as the twenties of the 19th century, we learn that retired British officers often took their *Hookas* with them to England, and in India, till then, the *Cheroot* which was more expensive was not popular with the Europeans.[2] Twining gives an interesting description of this apparatus:

"One of these great men as he was carried along (in a palanquin at Patna) smoked through a large tube, or snake as it was called, eight or ten feet long, which curled in several circles from an apparatus containing lighted spices and tobacco, and vessel of a water through which the smoke passed by means of a simple but scientific contrivance to be purified and cooled. This machine a man running by the side of the palanquin carried in his hands."[3]

The accounts given by Grose and Doyley agree with this description.[4]

The use of tobacco in raw form was also popular in Indian society. However, at Shahabad in Bihar, Buchanan noted that its use among men or women seldom commenced "before they are twenty years old". He also mentions that in the northern territories of the Company, apart from a few places like Gaya, women generally abstained from either smoking or chewing tobacco. It was popular only with the old ladies or professional prostitutes.[5] The chewing of the betel was another universal practice in Indian society, and it was an established practice to offer it to the guests.[6] Grose has described the ingredients used in the preparation of betels and observes:

"The practice of chewing betel is universal over India, as well as on the coast of China. It is produced at all visits and

[1] Spear: *op. cit.*, p. 98. Also Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 173-74.

[2] Spear: *op. cit.*, p. 99. [3] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[4] Grose: *op. cit. I*, p. 146. Doyley: *op. cit.*

[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 478; *II*, p. 425; *III*, p. 494.

[6] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 171.

entertainment among one another and even to the Europeans, some of whom, especially the Portuguese, and, very rarely indeed, some of the English have adopted the habit."[1]

## *Costumes, Cosmetics and Ornaments*

The costumes, cosmetics and ornaments of the period make a very fascinating study. In this sphere the controlling influences were the old Hindu and Mughal styles. The standard dress of the gentry, which may be called the Hindustani dress, largely represented a synthesis of the distinctive features of the two styles. This dress was also popular with the middle classes, particularly the commercial community. The clothes of the masses were plain, simple and scanty. The blazing tropical sun and their poverty eliminated all superfluity.[2] On the whole society preferred simplicity to glitter and in this respect Robert Orme says that the dress of the masses had not altered materially for "a thousand years". He also says that the people objected to mere foppery and frippery.[3] Undoubtedly the key-note was plain simplicity and the wardrobe was not characterized by variety and complexity of styles. In this respect, the main distinction between the upper and lower strata of society was of the quality and texture of cloth.[4]

## *Hindustani Male Dress*

The Hindustani male dress of the gentry was a compromise between the heavy and flowing garments of the Mughals and the close-fitting costume of the Rajputs. The distinctive Mughal costume was largely the outcome of the Persian style modified by Chinese and Turkish influences. Most of the items of their dress had been borrowed from the Arabs of the Abbasid period. The typical Arabic dress consisted of *Qamiz*, a long shirt reaching down to the ankles, the *Qaba* or cloak coming down to the legs with a skirt of tight sleeves, buttoned at the wrists and fastened over the left breast with a cord, used mostly at court

[1] Grose: *op. cit.*, pp. 237-38.
[2] Forster: *op. cit. I*, pp. 73-4 [3] Orme: *op. cit.*, p, 410.
[4] *Ibid.* He says: "The distinctions of dress in Indostan consist entirely in the fineness of the linen of which the habit is made."

ceremonies—the *Jubbah*, a robe with wide sleeves thrown over the *Qaba*. But the solemn injunction of the Prophet, "God will not look at him on the day of resurrection, who shall bear long garments from pride," discouraged the use of loose flowing garments. This was, however, not the case with the Mughals, with whom on account of Persian influences, loose and heavy clothes were current. Their *Peshwaz* or *Sharwals* and other items of dress mentioned in connection with the Arabs were very loose.[1] This style, modified by the Indian influences, finally resulted in the typical Hindustani dress of the aristocracy. The Mughal costume was modified by the Rajput dress which usually consisted of light turbans, close-fitting trousers, and a tight *Achkan* and a *Kamarband* (waist-band). The Muslims also adopted the rich ornamentation and appendages of the usual Hindu costume.[2]

We shall now describe the various items of this standardized costume evolved during the Mughal period, and popular with the gentry during our period of study. The head-dress consisted of either turbans or caps. *Nimas*, *Jamas*, trousers, *Kamarbands* were used for covering the body. The footwear consisted of sandals and slippers.[3] Buchanan remarks that the dress among the Hindus and Muslims of the uper classes in Bengal and Bihar was similar. He states that on ceremonial occasions the Hindus including the Brahmans dressed entirely like the Muslim gentry.[4] About South India, Dubois writes that the Muslim style was becoming popular with the Hindus, particularly in the Muslim States and the European settlements.[5] About Gujarat and Bombay Presidency, we have the testimony of Forbes that *Jama* was the popular article of dress both among the Hindus and Muslims. He has described it as a Muslim robe which "falls in full folds from the waist to the feet; the upper part is made to fit the body, and crossing over the bosom, is tied on the left side by the Hindoos, and by the Muhammadans on

1 See different plates for the different periods in Blochet: *Mussulman Paintings 1929* and Martin: *Miniature Painting and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey*. 2 Vols.

2 Martin: *op. cit.* 3 Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 69. Hodges: *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 283-85. Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 102-03, 105-06.

4 Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 93, 119, 475; *III*, p. 105.

5 Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 326.

the right.[1] According to the author of *Qanoon-i-Islam*, it required "immense quantity of cloth (from 11 to 30 breadths) in the skirt, which at the upper part is folded into innumerable plates; the body part is tied in two places on each side, being double breasted. The upper one of the right side is generally made into a knob with a number of strings".[2] We further note that in the North, the Hindus tied their *Jamas* on the right side while in the South the order was reverse.[3] Jackets with long loose sleeves and open cuffs were usually worn under the *Quba*, which was a long gown with flaps in the skirt and called by different names—*Mirzaee*, *Koorta*, *Kumeez*. *Angas* or *Chogas* were like the *Qubas* but without open flaps and were tight-fitting. *Jamas* and *Nimas* were long gowns, double-breasted descending up to legs. *Paijamas*, *Shilwar*, *Goorgee* or breeches, the former two being loose trousers, the latter two tight breeches reaching below the knees, were used for the lower portion.[4] Buchanan writes that in Northern India, the Hindus used *Dhotis* also under their trousers.[5] *Dopattas* and *Doshalas*, *Golubands* and *Romals* were used in addition.[6] The mode of tying the turbans which was an important head-dress was different in different castes and provinces.[7] In North India, with the Muslims, Kayastha scholars of Persian, and Brahman Pandits, scholars of Sanskrit, caps were also popular. Those of the former two were graceful and close-fitting, of the latter loose, descending with two flaps over the ears.[8] In their daily dress the *Dhotis* were commonly used for the lower part instead of trousers by the Hindus. They varied in size from the *Lungis* used by the Muslims and were also wound differently.[9] Over *Dhotis*, the use of a "half coat" was also popular.[10] In South India, the lower classes of Muslims, particularly during summers, used the *Dhotis* and *Dopattas* of the Hindus in place of vests and trousers. Buchanan assigns cheapness as the main reason for the popularity of the Hindu style of dress with the people of the lower classes. The Muslim

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 163.
[2] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, Appendix *III*, p. xi.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 102-03. [4] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, Appendix *III*, p. xi. [5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 102-03.
[6] *Qanoon-i-Islam*. Appendix *III*, [7] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 326.
[8] Martin: *op.cit.*, *I*, p. 93, 119., *II*, p. 418.
[9] *Ibid.*, *III*, pp. 105-06. [10] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 86.

suits were far more expensive and were consequently reserved for ceremonial occasions.[1] It has also been remarked by a few European observers that the white cloth was mostly used for turbans, scarfs, and robes, and light dress of females.[2]

## *Standards of Dress*

We have already observed that distinctions of dress among the different strata of society related to the fineness of cloth. In public places the gentry took special care to create an impression of opulence and splendour. Pearls and jewels glittered on their costume made of delicate silk, muslin and calico, and embellished with gold and silver embroidery.[3] Lavish use of costly ornaments and magnificent costume were a striking feature of upper-class dress both among the Hindus and Muslims. The Europeans have described the Indian Chiefs appearing in public splendidly dressed in vests of muslin and drawers of crimson and gold *keem-cab* and turbans of different colours and ornamentation. Necklaces of pearls and golden chains, clusters of gems and emeralds adorned their necks and upper parts of the body while bracelets and daggers studded with jewels and gold glittered on their arms and girdles.[4]

The dress of the middle classes did not differ from that of the aristocracy in items. Of course it was not so delicate in quality.[5] The Hindu merchants of superior rank are, however, mentioned as wearing costumes of a very fine quality, particularly of white muslin. On landing at the sea-shore, the foreigner's attention was first attracted by these merchants dressed in white loose robes and turbans of muslin, dignified and graceful in their appearance, moving in light boats across the ports.[6] Hodges records his first impression on landing at Madras as follows:

"This is the first moment in which European feels the great distinction between Asia and his own country. The rustling

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 417-18.; *III*, pp. 102-03.
[2] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 56, 75-6. Hodges: *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 283-85.
[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 69, 135, 163-64. Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 326. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 457.
[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 457. Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 102-03, 106.
[6] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 51-2.

of fine linen, and the general hum of unusual conversation, presents to his mind for a moment the idea of an assembly of females."[1]

Their mild countenance, with ears "having large gold ear-rings, set with precious stones hanging down to their shoulders, and in their nostrils small rings of the same kind", their loose flowing garments very often cheated the foreigner into a pleasant notion that they were ladies of "easy virtue".[2]

The common people did not display style and fashion of their more fortunate brethren. They were content with their simple dress consisting of *Dhotis* and wrappers of coarse cotton and turbans, if used, were of no better quality. On account of their extreme poverty, many were obliged to go almost naked with barely a loin-cloth covering their middle parts.[3] The Brahman priests are also described as very simple in their dress. They preferred simplicity for reasons of bodily cleanliness. Many of them went out almost naked with only the sacred thread prominently displayed over their body.[4] The simplicity of the popular costume was remarkable, and Craufurd writes:

"With them, modes and fashions are unknown; and their dresses, like their costumes, are the same today that I suppose they were at the beginning of the Kaly Youg."[5]

## *Female Dress*

Ali gives an elaborate description of the female dress of the Muslim gentry at Lucknow, and her account agrees with that

[1] Hodges: *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[2] Innes: *Narrative of Military Operations On the Coromandel Coast*, pp. 18-20. Writing about his first landing at Madras, he mentions how his high-land companions of the British Army, only after "a few familiarities" with them, detected, much to their disappointment, that they were men. He cites some of their remarks: "Only smoke the whiskers of that hussy", says one. "Well, I never supposed till now", observed another, "that there was any place in the world where the women wore beards." And upon seeing one of these merchants, who was very corpulent, stalk about the deck in an unwieldly manner—a third wondered: "How she could have ventured on board so far gone in her pregnancy." *Ibid.* pp. 19-20.

[3] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 73-4.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 326. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 50. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 282-83.

[5] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 282.

of Buchanan for the provinces of Bihar and Bengal. The most fashionable ladies wore *Pyjammas*, reaching the feet, made of extremely fine silk and cotton texture highly embroidered. The *Zarband* or the silk-cord which held it at the waist was often "rendered magnificent with pearls and jewel".[1] Their *Ungeeah* (bodice), which was of varied material and ornamentation, was made "to fit the bust with great exactness" and fastened behind by cotton cords. Their sleeves, which were short and tight, were invariably "finished with some fanciful embroidery".[2] Over it was also worn a *Courte*, "a transparent shirt which covered the waist-band of the pyjama but did not screen it".[3] The *Dopatta* is mentioned as the most graceful part of the costume, "a useful envelope" forming a large sheet of choicest quality, falling gracefully over the body, one end partially covering the lady and the other flung carelessly over the next shoulder.[4] The muslins manufactured at Dacca, "transparent and soft as the web of the gossamer spider" called *Shub-num* (night-dew), as also *Crepe de Chine* gauzes and chintzes, were preferred to other varieties of cloth.[5] In Muslim society the *Boorka* or the veil was very popular as it was considered a symbol of respectability. It had a "net-worked" space for the eyes to enable the lady to see. It was invariably used by ladies of rank when they did not move out in *dolies* or palanquins.[6] Forbes describes the Muslim veil as an elegant part of female attire "so esteemed from the time of Rebekah to the present day". A Persian lady presented one of "purple silk-net, embroidered with silver" to Forbes's sister at Baroche.[7]

The Muslim women of middle and lower classes in Bihar and Bengal are described as generally dressing like Hindu women, using *Sari* after the Hindu style instead of *Peshwaz*

[1] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 106-07.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 107-08.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 108.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 108-09.
[5] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 108-09. For the popularity of these items of dress in Bihar and Bengal, see Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 119; *II*, pp. 416-17; *III*, pp. 104-05.
[6] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, Appendix *III*, p. xvi. 36.
[7] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 163.

the use of which was confined to the aristocracy or dancing girls. They also used the Hindu petticoat—*Lahanga* and *Korta* (bodice). These two items were very popular in the north-western parts of India.[1] The *Sari* was commonly used by the Hindu women all over the country, and it covered almost the whole of the body, tied round the waist, gracefully hanging down to the feet with one fold covering the upper part.[2] Here is a description of the young ladies of Calcutta:

> "Many young women also, with large circular ear-rings in their ears, and broad bracelets on their wrists, descended and mounted the steps (of the ghat at the Ganges), holding with one hand a jar or pitcher upon the head. Nothing could be more elegant and picturesque than the attitude and whole appearance of these delicate well-formed females, with their light white dress, consisting of one long piece of cloth, which, descending from the head, encircled the waist, and fell in graceful folds nearly to the ankle, not straight, but sloping, leaving one leg more exposed than the other. Strongly did the scene before me recall to my mind the beautiful picture of the ancient manners of the East . . . ."[3]

The French missionary writes of *Saris*, as follows:

> "All sorts and kinds are made, in every shade and at every price, and they always have a border of a contrasting colour."[4]

The *Ghagra* or *Lahanga* was no less popular in Bihar and the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh but it necessitated the use of *Dopattah* to cover the upper part.[5] The jackets called *Angia* or *Cholis*, etc., used by the Hindu women did not differ from those used by the Muslim women.[6] All over the country the female dress was almost uniform and similar. No European has emphasized any difference in this connection, and Ives especially remarks that he could preceive no variation in the general style at Madras and Calcutta.[7] In Northern India, notions of social propriety demanded that women should move out in streets properly covered and muffled up. In South India, how-

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 119; *II*, pp. 416-17; *III*, pp. 104-05.

[2] *Ibid. III*, pp, 106-07. Buchanan: *op. cit. I*, pp. 207-08, Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 54. Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 344.

[3] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 75.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 344.

[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p 119, 475; *II*, pp. 416-17

[6] *Ibid.* also *III*, pp. 106-07 and Dubois: p. 344

[7] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 48

ever, particularly on the Malabar coast, women of the working classes are mentioned as moving out completely naked above the waist like their men-folk. This was partly dictated by poverty and climate.[1] In this connection, Grose writes:

> "The women of these countries are not allowed to cover any part of their breasts, to the naked display of which they annex no idea of immodesty, which in fact ceases by the familiarity of it to the eye."[2]

The foreign accounts also emphasize that the dress of women was simpler than that of men, consisting of a few very useful items: a jacket to cover the breasts with sleeves reaching about half-way to the elbow, *Lahanga* serving as a petticoat, and *Korta* covering the upper part. The *Sari* elegantly served the purpose of the latter two items.[3] Shoes and slippers of different shapes were in use as footwear and differed from those of men in ornamentation and delicacy.[4] For children there was no distinctive dress, though *Shulooka* has been mentioned as a separate costume of the infants.[5]

## *Cosmetics*

In Indian society the artificial aids to personal appearance were in marked contrast to the general simplicity of life. Of Muslim society Ali writes that well-curled mustachios were "much esteemed and preserved amongst young men with nicest care".[6] Even in their old age people were anxious to retain their youthful appearance. They applied a dye "composed of Mayndhi and indigo" to their grey beards which thereupon retained their "glossy hue" for nearly six months.[7] The religious-minded old men, of course, permitted their silvery white beards to grow and flourish almost right down to their girdles.[8] Shaving of heads appears to be a universal practice. The Hindus, of course, kept a lock of hair at the centre.[9] "The men, in most of the Hindoo

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 344. [2] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p 244.
[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp 286-87. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 451.
[4] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, Appendix *III*, pp. xvi-xvii. [5] *Ibid.*
[6] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 114-15. [7] *Ibid.*, also Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 469.
[8] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 115-16.
[9] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 92. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 415.

tribes", writes Forbes, "shave the head and beard, but leave the mustachios on the upper lip, and a small lock of hair on the head".[1] A study of the paintings of the period would reveal that growing of beards was popular with Muslims in the old age only and shaving of mustache was not practised.[2] It is, however, emphasized that in Kashmir, and further west towards the mountain, the beard was invariably preserved. Forster says:

> "The growth of the beard is encouraged, perhaps from a certain ferocity of disposition incident to their situation, and generally predominant in the disposition of the mountaineers, which prompts them, in different modes, to show a disdain and contempt for the softener manners of the natives of the low country."[3]

Among the Hindus, social propriety dictated ornamentation of the forehead, with caste or sectarian marks and symbols. A bare forehead was a sign of uncleanliness, mourning, fasting or of the fact that ablutions had not been performed. It was considered improper to appear before superior persons in that condition. Different marks and emblems were likewise painted or tattooed on other parts of the body.[4]

The ladies had carried the art of personal decoration to a high pitch of development. Forbes writes of Hindu women: "No women can be more attentive to cleanliness than the Hindoos; they take every method to render their persons delicate, soft and attractive."[5] They were particularly fastidious about their hair. Forbes further observes that they "perfume their hair with oil of cloves, cinnamon, sandal mogrees, and other sweet-scented flowers; and those who can afford it, use the oil, or attar of roses; this delicate and costly perfume is made in Persia and the northern provinces of Hindostan."[6] According to him, "perfumed oils and spicy unguents for the person" were in great demand in the east.[7] Buchanan says that among women, the mark of vermilion (red lead) on the forehead, *Kajal* (collyrium) in the eyes, and ornaments were the

[1] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 52. [2] Refer to the paintings in Martin's *Eastern India and Hill: Bengal 1756-57.*
[3] Forster: *op. cit., I*, pp. 308-09.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 336-38. [5] Forbes: *op. cit.. I*, 54.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 63. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 469.

necessary symbols of *Sohag*, denied only to the widows.[1] The virgins were also not allowed to use vermilion.[2] Speaking of women in South India, Dubois says that marks of yellow saffron "adorned every visible part of their body," while their eyelids were carefully beautified with antimony. Their hair, rendered glossy silky by oils, were parted in the middle and elegantly combed back; sweet flowers and ornaments lent them a fascinating glamour.[3] The custom of tattooing the arms of the young females is also mentioned as quite common.[4]

We learn that the low-caste and half-caste women living in concubinage with Europeans made an extravagent use of scents and fragrant oils. In connection with these women, Capt. Williamson quotes the couplet of Swift:

*Enriched with all the gay perfume,*
*She wafts a stench around the room.*[5]

The dancing girls of the country, patronized by the aristocracy and the growing European community, had also carried these accomplishments to perfection. These "votaries of pleasure", according to Craufurd, were indeed the most fashionable class of the age. Their whole life was a round of varied experiences. They had to acquire the refinement and glamour "which tend to captivate and entertain the other sex".[6] Their costumes were rich and gaudy, their arts pleasing and seductive. Raynal and Grose dwell on the extreme care they took in preserving the charms of their external appearance.[7] At Surat, the city of the Mughal nobility and a centre of foreign commerce in the 18th century, they had perfected a mode of preserving their breasts which was unique and uncommon. Grose, however, writes that it was in use with other women of the country also. We have the following account of it:

"They enclosed them in hollow cups or cases of very light wood, linked together or bucked at the back. The casing exactly fitted them."

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 419. [2] *Ibid*
[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 344-45.
[4] *Ibid.*. p. 344, also Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 120.
[5] Williamson: *op. cit.*, p. 200.
[6] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 288.
[7] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 42. Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 143-44.

Their cases were very smooth and supple and prevented busts from growing "to any disgustfully exuberant size". They also did no harm to "the exquisitely tender texture of the flesh in that part". Their outside covering was of gold, or silver gilt plating and was also set with gems in the case of the rich.[1] It is, however, pleasing to note that these dance-women, with all their superior arts and blandishments, mentioned by Europeans, had "nothing of that nefarious boldness which characterizes the European prostitutes".[2]

## *Ornaments*

Ornaments had a peculiar fascination for the people of all classes in that age. Even the *Sanyasis* who had renouned the world wore copper ear-rings in token of humility.[3] Love of ornaments was, and still is, an inherent weakness of Indian character. This was particularly true of women. We do not intend to enumerate the full catalogue of jewellery in vogue for almost every part of the body from head to toe. We shall only survey the popular passion and craze for them throughout society.

The ornaments of women were characterized by an endless variety of patterns and designs. In this connection, Dubois remarks:

> "But to enumerate all the different kinds of ornaments worn by the Hindu ladies would take a very long time. To give a single instance, I could mention eighteen or twenty different kinds of ornaments that were used for the ears alone."[4]

In the writings of Captain Williamson edited by J.B. Gilchrist we have an exhaustive description of female ornaments.[5] Of the Muslim jewellery in the 18th century which was not materially different from that of the Hindus, the author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* gives a clear estimate. He mentions about eighty chief ornaments for head and forehead alone, sixteen for ears, five for the nose, about thirty for the neck and a similar number of different armlets, bracelets, rings for fingers, ornaments for waists, for ankles, toes, etc.[6] The types of ornaments differed from class

[1] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 142.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 144. [3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 335.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp, 345-46. [5] Williamson: *op. cit.*, pp. 193-99.
[6] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, Appendix IV, pp. xvii-xxvii.

to class and community to community. Of the district of Dinajpur in Bengal, Buchanan writes:

"The jewels and ornaments worn by the Muhammedans are quite different from those used by the Hindus. In general the Muhammedans use fewer ornaments of gold and silver than the Hindus, and are fonder of pearls and precious stones. In place of the brass or shell ornaments used by the lower Hindus, the lower Muhammedan women use rings of tin or lac."[1]

Pillai remarks that the aristocracy in the South had great fondness for pearls.[2] Of the higher classes, ornaments for head, ears, nostrils, necks, arms, wrists, and hands were generally made of gold, those of the lower of silver. Only the ruling nobility had the privilege of using ornaments of gold for the legs—the rest had to be content with baser metals.[3] Dubois definitely states that gold ornaments were not used for feet and that the weight of ornaments was immaterial.[4] According to him, the gold ornaments were generally oval in shape and rich people had pearls or precious stones set in the ornaments. The ear-ornaments which were very popular were in many cases "of enormous size". In some parts of South India, "a gold ring is also attached to the cartilage which divides the nostrils".[5] The use of ornaments was universal. In Bengal and Bihar, a large part of the female population appeared to Buchanan "completely bedecked".[6] The lower classes could not afford the luxury of precious jewellery, but their women would not be without rings on their arms and lead-paint on their forehead. Rings of glass or coloured lac of different shapes were also most popular with women.[7] A ring of gold or of some metal for the nose, too, appears to be an absolute necessity for a woman of the 18th century.[8]

The women of the rich classes displayed their riches by extravagant use of ornaments. On "grand occasions" of social and religious ceremonies, the ornaments were displayed "in abun-

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 698.
[2] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 79-80., Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 345-46.
[3] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, Appendix *IV*, p. xvii, footnote.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 345-46.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 335.
[6] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 120; *II*, p. 419.
[7] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 93.
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 419.

dance".[1] About the women of the merchant classes, Dubois writes that as they were generally wealthy, "they manage to make up for their lack of beauty by their elegant attire".[2] According to Forbes, a Hindu lady "of distinction always seems to be overloaded with finery". But the unsophisticated "village nymphs" with fewer ornaments and simple clothing appeared to him more captivating. Here is a description of high class Hindu women from his pen:

> "Their long black hair is adorned with jewels, and wreaths of flowers; their ears are bored in many places, and loaded with pearls; a variety of gold chains, strings of pearls, and precious stones, fall from the neck over the bosom; and the arms are covered with bracelets from the wrist to the elbow; they have also gold and silver chains round the ankles and abundance of rings on their fingers and toes; among these on the fingers is frequently a small mirror."[3]

The use of ornaments was also popular with men, particularly with the Hindus. "In their ears", Craufurd says, "which are always exposed, all the Hindoos wear large gold rings, ornmented, according to their taste or means of purchasing them, with diamonds, rubies, or other precious stones."[4] The nobility appeared on ceremonial occasions overloaded with glittering jewellery. Here is a brief reference to a Maharaja of South India:

> "Over his neck was a double row of ordinary pearls, sustaining a splendid ornament, composed of four of the largest sized rubies."[5]

Forbes describes Raghoba, the Maratha prince, with his turban "adorned with strings of diamond and rubies, and a very valuable emerald; from his neck descended two rows of beautiful pearls, sustaining a cluster of diamonds; his ear-rings, according to the Hindoo costume, were Iour large pearls, and as many transparent perforated rubies; or gold rings two or three inches in diametre: he wore a rich bracelet on his right arm; the handle of his catarra, or a short dagger, was studded with jewels; the hilt of his broad sword plain gold."[6] He writes of the Hindus in general in the Bombay Presidency as follows:

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 335. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 23.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 54. [4] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 284.
[5] *Ayyavoo's Diary of a Tour Through Southern India*, p. 169.
[6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 135.

"Their ears are bored, and adorned with large gold rings, passing through two pearls or rubies; and on the arms they wear bracelets of gold or silver. The Princes and nobles are adorned with pearl-necklaces and golden chains, sustaining clusters of costly gems; their turbans are enriched with diamonds, rubies, and emeralds; and their bracelets composed of gold and precious stones."[1]

The Muslims, too, delighted in such extravagant pageantry. The sons of Tipu, sent as hostages to the camp of Lord Cornwallis, are described as wearing necklaces of pearls round their necks.[2] The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* passes strictures on the members of his faith for such unlawful imitations of Hindu practices in this and many other respects.[3] Children in particular were especially decorated with ornaments. Almost all of them wore amulets or hollow tubes of gold or silver tied above the elbows. These were believed to be of wondrous efficacy and could avert misfortune. These amulets also contained "magical mantrams".[4]

## *Habitations and Furniture*

From a study of the foreign sources of information on people's habitations in the 18th century, it appears that India was a land of dramatic contrasts. Here magnificent palaces peeped out in a wilderness of miserable dwellings. Behind the castles of the nobility skulked the huts and hovels of the wretched humanity. The cheap, inelegant dwelling houses were also huddled together in the narrow streets of the towns. The broad gulf between the richer and the poorer sections of society was clearly reflected in the habitations of people. We shall endeavour to describe their salient features as observed by Europeans.

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 52.

[2] *Selections, Calcutta Gazette, II*, p. 333. About the necklace of Sultan Tipu, Lord Valentia writes: "It is still unknown who gave the fatal wound to the Sultan: the invaluable string of pearls, which he wore round his neck, was the prize of the soldier, but it has never been produced, or traced. He had been many years collecting this; always taking off an inferior pearl, when he could purchase one of more value". *op. cit., Asiatic Annual Register for the Year 1809* "Books" p. 489.

[3] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, Appendix IV, footnotes.

[4] Dubois: Hindu Manners, pp. 335-36.

The external appearance of people's habitations in general has been spoken of as characterized by extreme simplicity of styles. According to Craufurd, "useful and ornamental architecture" had made great progress in the country but the people were "less attentive to the internal convenience and elegance of their houses."[1] In the opinion of Dubois, the masses were content with little dens, and he says: "The simplicity of their houses equals that of their costume."[2]

The houses of the rich classes in the cities, particularly of Northern India, were, however, of a different description. They were better built and consisted of spacious apartments, court-yards, gardens, tanks, etc., within a compound. They made ample provision for privacy and shade.[3] Twining speaks of the palatial residences of the royalty and nobility at Delhi as spacious and magnificent habitations, as beautiful specimens of "Oriental workmanship".[4] At places like Patna and Varanasi, he observed that the palaces of the rich inhabitants across the Ganga were extensive, handsome habitations, surrounded by large gardens.[5] Bernier, who wrote his account in the later 17th century, enunciates the principles on which the palatial buildings of the nobility were constructed. "In these hot countries," he says, "a house is considered beautiful if it be capacious, and if the situation be airy and exposed on all sides to the wind, especially to the northern breezes." At Delhi, he observed that the residential buildings of the nobility were either on the bank of the river or in the suburbs, "scattered in every direction". It is necessary to cite his account in full, as it agrees with the stray references in the various sources of the period:

> "A good house has its courtyards, gardens, trees, basins of water, small *jets d'eau* in the hall or at the entrance, and handsome subterraneous apartments which are furnished with large fans, and on account of their coolness are fit places for repose from noon until four or five o'clock, when the air becomes suffocatingly warm ....They consider that a house to be greatly admired ought to be situated in the middle of a large flower garden, and should have four large divan-apartments raised to the height of man from the ground, and exposed to the four

[1] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 291-92. [2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 327-28.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*. *I*, p. 55, [4] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 226-27, 230.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 153-54.

winds so that the coolness may be felt from any quarter. Indeed no handsome dwelling is ever seen without terraces on which the family may sleep during the night. They always open into a large chamber into which the bedstead is easily moved in case of rain, when thick clouds of dust arise, when the cold air is felt at break of day, or when it is found necessary to guard against those light but penetrating dews which frequently cause a numbness in the limbs and induce a species of paralysis."[1]

From what has been said, it can be concluded that climate cost, convenience, privacy, etc., were the governing principles of the styles of buildings. The styles of construction among the people of various classes differed widely. We shall describe their habitations under the following categories:

(a) Habitations of the nobility;
(b) Houses of the middle classes; and
(c) Huts and hovels of the lower classes.

## *Habitations of the Nobility*

The habitations of the nobility were colossal edifices, comprising spacious, artistically built apartments, elegant gardens, tanks and fountains, within a large compound. In his description of the residential quarters of the Nawab of Surat, Stavorinus says that the entire building contained "infinite number of large saloons, and small apartments", more than 700 in number, enclosed within a high stone-wall. The main entrance was through a large stone gate in this boundary wall. There were several storeys; the baths were in the second, the *Mahal* or seraglio, the private apartments of the ladies, were in the uppermost storey. The compound was furnished with a garden containing beautiful cisterns and fountains. In the garden was a spacious tank.[2] Many other Europeans have emphasized that the habita-

[1] Bernier: *op. cit.*, p. 247.

[2] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 465-68. No European of the period has attempted an accurate description of the *Mahal* or seraglio which was the most striking feature of the dwellings of the aristocracy. Bernier gives the following account of the royal seraglio at Delhi, which he received from the eunuchs: "They inform me that the seraglio contains beautiful apart-

(*Continued*)

tions of the aristocracy and rich merchants were extensive, impressive and detached within walled fencing. The apartments for the ladies were either in the back or in the upper storeys. The *Diwan-i-Khas* or the principal room for the master to receive and entertain guests generally opened towards the garden. The apartments for the *Zenana* were also self-sufficient in all respects. The "security for women" has been mentioned as a vital consideration of house-constructions.[1] Ali gives us an idea of the popular style of the buildings of the Muslim gentry at Lucknow. They were quadrangular in shape; on three sides were the quarters of habitation, and on the fourth kitchen, offices, lumber rooms, etc. In the centre was an open courtyard. The dwelling apartments were raised a few steps higher from this. These were supported by a line of pillars in front and their sides and backs were merely high walls without windows or apertures for air. The fronts of these apartments faced the court and admitted air inside. These apartments were spacious enough to be divided into long halls, and at their extreme corners were located small rooms or "dark closets" to serve as "repository of valuables or stores". The doors of the *Mahals* were fixed at these rooms. The floors were constructed "either of beaten earth, bricks, or stones". The "boarded floors" had not been introduced till her day. The privacy of the different halls was secured by means of thick "wadded curtains", so made as to fit every opening between the pillars supporting the roofs. These halls of the *Zenana* were large enough to be further partitioned by two rows of pillars into separate apartments. The courtyard and separate apartments for the ladies have been emphasized by her as salient features of such habitations.[2] Baths were another essential feature, very elegantly built, mentioned in contemporary accounts.[3] Here is a description of them:

"Mahomedans in opulent circumstances, and especially those

ments, separated, and more or less spacious and splendid, according to the rank and income of the females. Nearly every chamber has its reservoir of running water at the door; on every side are gardens, delightful alleys, shady retreats, streams, fountains, grottoes, deep excavations that afford shelter from the sun by day, lofty divans and terraces on which to sleep coolly at night. Within the walls of this enchanting place, in fine, no oppressive or inconvenient heat is felt." Bernier: *op. cit.*, p. 267.

[1] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 110-11. Hodges: *op. cit.*, pp. 105-06. Twining: *op. cit.* pp. 226-27. [2] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 304-05. [3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 156.

of rank, generally have baths lined with marble or masonry. These are placed in some private apartments, to which their families can have immediate access. They are sometimes furnished with an apparatus for heating water to any temperature. . ."[1]

There were separate sleeping and guest chambers, and there is reference to separate smoking rooms also. The smoking room of the Prince of Oudh at Lucknow had a floor of marble of 20 sq. ft. "arranged with a taste and judgment that do infinite credit to the artist".[2]

Besides these, the gardens and pleasure grounds were also a necessary part of the habitations of the aristocracy. The Mughals especially delighted in gardens. Grose remarks that like Persians they were very fond of gardens which had "airy pavilions" and neat spots in the centre. Their ponds were as pretty as those of the Chinese, with "finely ornamented steps down to the water side". The "flower-beds over the green" inside the gardens were picturesque and fascinating.[3] Another European has described these gardens as resembling "a rich Turkey carpet", "particularly adapted to the retired pleasures of a Mahomedan life, the principal requirements of which are coolness, space, and secrecy". The nobles considered it "both graceful and healthy to live much among the fragrance of plants and flowers".[4]

The enclosure of high boundary walls was another common feature of these habitations. The tastes of the high Hindu or Muslim classes in these respects do not appear to differ. Forbes emphasizes that their houses were built on the same plan. They had their main rooms around a spacious court, and "galleries or verandahs" in front of them. The whole building was constructed within a high enclosure. Of the court, he writes:

"This court is frequently adorned with shrubs and flowers; and a fountain playing before the principal room, where the master receives his guests, which is open in front to the garden, and furnished with carpets and cushions."[5]

[1] Williamson: *op. cit.* p. 206.
[2] *Selections, Calcutta Gazette, II*, p. 353.
[3] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 137.
[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 152-54.
[5] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 55.

These accounts reflect a very high standard of living of the Indian aristocracy.

## *Of the Middle Classes*

The houses of the middle classes widely differed in design in different parts of the country. In Northern India, Craufurd says that houses "of two or three storeys are very frequent".[1] The well-to-do classes preferred to live in houses of bricks with flat plastered roofs. Their floors and terraces were generally constructed of "fine pulverized stones" mixed with lime water and "an inferior kind of molasses", and were "as hard as mortar". These terraces were useful for sleeping in the open during summer months. In brick-built houses the use of wood was avoided as far as possible.[2] At Varanasi, Hodges observed that many private buildings possessed "considerable magnificence". "The houses are very high", he says, "I observed some in which I counted five storeys". The rich Hindus, however, preferred to live "in detached houses, with open courts, surrounded by a wall".[3] At Patna, he likewise found that the buildings were very high.[4] At Ramnagar, every house was built of stone and had the appearance of a fort.[5] These remarks are corroborated by Twining, who perceived that the style of buildings at Varanasi was different from what he had seen in the cities of the eastern parts. He writes:

> "The houses were lofty and the streets narrow for the sake of shade and coolness. The houses of the natives hitherto seen seldom exceeded one storey, and were spreading and irregular; here they were more compact, and had two or three storeys, with sometimes a room or two upon the terrace at top for sleeping in the hot season. They were built with very small bricks, of a dark red, generally left in their natural state, but sometimes covered with white chunam, or plaster. Many were painted with different colours. Some of the rich inhabitants had large houses overlooking the Ganges . . . on the opposite side of the city, where I saw some handsome palaces, surrounded by extensive gardens."[6]

1 Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 292.
2 Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 513-14.
3 Hodges: *op. cit.*, pp. 60-62.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 51.
6 Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 153-54.

Buchanan, however, informs that in Bihar the houses of many storeys were quite common. They were generally built of bricks or rough stones set in clay mortar, and had plastered flat roofs. In Bihar, however, tiled roofs and mud walls were popular with the lower middle classes. He writes that houses with mud walls and two storeys were called *Kothas*. They generally consisted of two apartments, one above the other.[1] At Arra, in Bihar, in the first decade of the 19th century, a house of clay walls and two storeys, of two chambers one above the other from ten to fifteen cubits long (approximately from five to seven and a half yards) and six in width, cost from seventy to hundred rupees. A single storeyed house cost from twenty to forty rupees.[2] The tiled roofs, which were a prominent feature of habitations towards the eastern districts, required constant repair, "but a slight terrace of earth over the upper storey and under the tiles" obviated the nuisance of excessive heat or cold.[3]

As we move towards Bengal, a striking change is visible in the construction of houses. In two-storeyed houses, the upper rooms were smaller than the lower ones so much so that a man of average stature could not stand erect. The roofs were generally tiled.[4] The houses of bricks of many apartments were solely confined to the aristocracy or the uppermost wealthy middle classes of bankers, merchants, etc.[5] In the district of Purneah, says Buchanan, the people "would consider the proposal of any person, under the degree of a Raja, to build a house of brick as little short of insanity".[6] The houses of the rich middle classes are described as merely a collection of huts called *Baris* or *Havelis* which were fenced all round. The houses were also made of wooden or bamboo frames, and covered with tiles.[7] The construction of roofs was different. In Bengal they were generally of two sides meeting in an arched ridge. The thatched roofs were supported by wooden posts, had no beams to connect the frames of the walls, while the usual dimensions of such houses were from ten to fifteen cubits (two cubits approximately make one yard) in length and six to eight cubits

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 113.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 474. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 116. [4] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 91.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 696. [6] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 95.
[7] *Ibid.*, *III*, pp. 96, 99-100.

in width.[1] In Bihar, at many places they formed a sort of pyramid and consisted of four triangular sides.[2]

From these accounts, it is clear that houses in Bengal were far inferior to those in the western parts. They were not spacious and were devoid of elegance on account of the low quality of materials used. In this respect, South India had a decided superiority over Bengal. Here the houses had spacious courtyards and separate arrangements for kitchen, etc. Even in those places, like Aurangabad in Berar, where the houses were mostly of wood and had no upper storey, their rear was "much better and more spacious."[3] The style of houses in South India was, however, simpler than those in Northern India and has been referred to as the original Hindu style. Craufurd's description of it is as follows:

> "For the sake of coolness, and to avoid the trouble of stairs, they are only of one storey. On each side of the door towards the street is a narrow gallery. Covered by the slope of the roof of the house, which projects over it, and which, as far as the gallery extends, is supported by brick or wooden pillars. The floor of the gallery is raised about 30 inches above the level of the street . . . . The entrance leads into a court, part of which is also surrounded by a gallery like that without. On one side of the court there is a large room on a level with the floor of the gallery, and open in front, which is spread with nets or carpets, and these again covered with white cotton cloth. Here the master of the house receives visitors . . . . The entrances from the court to the private apartments and offices are by very small doors. The houses may be more or less extensive, may have one or more courts or public rooms; but they are commonly built on a plan similar to that I have described. In the northern parts of Hindostan, however, houses of two or three storeys are very frequent; and ruins of palaces are to be met with all over the country, which announce the splendour and magnificence of its ancient princes."[4]

In the rural areas these habitations were generally of mud walls and thatched roofs as elsewhere in the country. But in the towns brick houses were quite common. All these had galleries

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, p. 97. [2] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 91.
[3] Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 269. [4] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 291-92.

round their main rooms, and were equipped with courtyards. The entrance was generally from the court side and the kitchen was placed at the farthest corner. Raised and round platforms were usually constructed outside "the principal entrance door". These were large enough for people to chat and receive their guests. The houses in South India were mostly of tiled roofs as in Bengal and, according to Dubois, lacked "symmetry".[1] According to Ives, the houses and gardens together of rich merchants at Madras generally occupied "an acre of ground" "and accommodated families with no less than ten or twelve persons" in each.[2]

From what has been said above, it is clear that the houses of the middle strata of society varied in styles in different regions. Those of the rich sections were spacious and comfortable with separate arrangements for kitchens, stores, etc. Malcolm says that in Central India, in the houses of the Borahs, a Muslim trading community, well-constructed chimneys, too, were introduced.[3] According to Ali, chimneys had not been introduced even in the houses of the Muslim gentry at Lucknow. The kitchen was certainly placed at a safe distance from the apartments of habitation "to prevent any great annoyance from the smoke".[4] The use of openings to serve as windows in the walls was also rare and is not emphasized in the accounts. Glass windows are mentioned only in connection with the European buildings in the foreign settlements.[5] In the houses of more than one storey, the use of staircases was quite common. But the use of the wooden ladder was most popular in the lower sections.[6] Lime was generally used to whitewash the houses and give them an elegant appearance. The interior of the rooms was also made pleasing with many soothing colours. In the houses of the rich classes, we come across various embellishments. The beams of the ceilings were "curiously inlaid with ivory, and mother of pearl".[7] The galleries and walls were often ornamented with paintings, described by Buchanan as caricatures of "the gods, heroes and beasts". At Gaya and Patna, he also observed

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 327-28. [2] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 27.
[3] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. iii, footnote. [4] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 324.
[5] *Ibid.*, also Stavorinus: *I*, pp. 513-14. [6] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 91.
[7] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 110-11. See also Doyle: *op. cit.*, pp. 86-87.

that "carved wooden work" in front of the galleries was the chief ornament of houses.[1] In connection with these decorations the remarks of Elphinstone are interesting:

"Walls of houses are often painted in the water colours, and sometimes in oils. The subjects are mythology, battles, processions, wrestlers, male and female figures, and animals, with no landscape, or at best a tree or two, or a building, stuck in without any knowledge of perspective, or any attention to light and shade."[2]

The bungalow, a single-family residential quarter of mixed Indo-European style, popular in the European settlements and British cantonments, was not popular with any section of Indian society till the end of our period. It will, however, not be out of place to include a description of it here as given by Hodges:

"Bungalows are buildings in India, generally raised on a base of brick, one, two, or three feet from the ground, and consist of only one storey; the plan of them usually is a large room in the centre for an eating and sitting room, and rooms at each corner for sleeping; the whole is covered with one general thatch, which carries low to each side; the space between the angle rooms are Viranders, or open porticoes, to sit in during the evenings; the centre hall is lighted from all sides with windows and a large door in the centre; sometimes the centre Viranders, at each end, are converted into rooms."[3]

## *Of the Lower Classes*

The houses of the lower classes have generally been described as thatched huts of mud with single opening for air, light and entrance. Towards the Eastern Coast, in many villages of South India, Heyne could find "scarcely a hut that was sufficiently covered to keep out the rain".[4] Ives writes that the houses of the working classes in the suburbs of Madras were "nothing but huts covered with cajan leaves". These were so low that they could not stand upright in them and on entering them, they were even obliged "to creep in on their hands and feet".[5] About

[1] Martin: *op. cit., I*, p. 117. [2] Beveridge: *op. cit., II*, p. 140.
[3] Hodges: *op. cit.*, p. 146, footnote.
[4] Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 258. [5] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 47.

1745, an English sailor gives the following account of the hovels of the poor classes at Kalpi, a small coastal town in Bengal:

"The poor natives live in mud houses thatched with straw; the whole furniture consisting of a mat on which they sleep wrap'd in their turban unfolded (which with the rag that comes through the thighs . . . is all their clothes) and some earthen pot to boil their rice and currie and a goblet to hold water (their only beverage) is the whole furniture; some may have a brass bowl from which they pour their water into their mouth, never put it to the lip . . . ."[1]

Stavorinus says that the houses, "or rather the huts, of the poor Bengalese are mostly made of mud and straw, and receive their light through the entrance".[2] About the working classes at Surat, Abbe de Guyon about 1745 writes that the dwellings of "these unfortunate slaves" resembled barns built of nothing but reeds plastered with cow-dung and mud.[3] In Bihar and Bengal, the cottages and huts of the working classes, in urban and rural areas, were mostly hovels of mud, of a beehive appearance. Where the villages were not concealed by plantations, the wretchedness of these huts was most conspicuous. At many places in the north-western districts under the East India Company these huts were so wretched that they could hardly afford protection against the inclemencies of the weather.[4]

The mud walls and thatched roofs were the outstanding features of general habitations in the country. They were a clear evidence of the misery and poverty of the masses. The dearth of brick houses in the rural areas, too, takes us to that conclusion. Buchanan writes that in the districts of Gaya and Patna, even the farmers of moderate means lived in rude huts, covered with thatched roofs, had a wretched shed for cooking and a hut for their cattle. The addition of a second hut and a granary like a large beehive was considered a "comfortable abode". Each hut usually consisted of one apartment, 11 cubits long by 7 wide. If the occupant was a trader or an artisan, he had a narrow gallery in front to serve as a shop.[5] According to him, the hut was a

[1] *Bengal, Past and Present*, 45, p. 100. [2] Stavorinus: *op. cit*, *I*. pp. 514-15. [3] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 288.

[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 36, 47, 51, 60, 117; *II*, pp. 382-83; *III*, p. 98.

[5] *Ibid.*, *I*. p. 118.

"Muhammedan innovation" and was introduced when the "command of these haughty conquerors rendered it necessary to secrete the women".[1] The styles of constructions of these dwellings varied in different parts. We have it recorded that the popular fashion in Bengal favoured arched ridges. The roofs had even four sloping sides, and were called *Chautarkha*. The style popular at Tirhut favoured straight ridges, and roofs of two sloping sides.[2] In the district of Rangpur, the *Nakaris*, dwellings of the lower classes, resembled the cottages of England. They had bent roofs of two sides with a straight ridge. The primitive tribes towards the eastern frontiers built such cottages generally. They were supported on a platform by posts, and provided better accommodation.[3] In South India, similar differences are noticeable. Round about Madras the huts are mentioned of the shape of a parallelogram "without veranda or windows, or any other vent for the smoke than the doors". The rich people built a number of such huts "in the form of a square, sufficient to accommodate their families, which are always numerous".[4] The habitations of the people round about Seringapatam, called *Chera*, were like "beehives, and consist of a circular mud wall about three feet high, which is covered with a large conical roof of thatch". One small door was "the only outlet for smoke; and the only inlet for air and light". A family of better status and means had separate huts for sleeping, cooking and for stores. The wealthy added more huts to their premises.[5] In Malabar, the habitations of the lower classes are described as superior to those generally seen in the Indian villages. Those of the upper classes were neat, detached and decent villas surrounded by gardens. They were built of mud, occupied two sides of square area which was raised, and kept very smooth and clean. The mud used was of an excellent quality "either whitewashed or painted."[6] From these descriptions we can see that conditions of life of the masses have not materially altered in the country since then. We shall now consider the main items of household articles.

[1] Martin: *op. cit., III*, p. 697. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 100-01. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 489.
[4] Buchanan: *op. cit., I*, p. 33. [5] *Ibid., II*, p. 192.
[6] *Ibid., II*, pp. 346, 352-53.

## *Furniture and Household Articles*

From what has been said before we can easily realize that the houses of the nobility were equipped with all the necessary comforts and luxuries. The rooms were furnished with mattings, carpets, cushions of high texture. Their bedsteads and other items of furniture were of excellent workmanship. Forbes writes that the upper classes in Gujarat had a "favourite upper chamber, with walls and ceilings covered with mirrors of every size and shape; in the centre is a sofa, or a swinging bed, suspended from the roof, adorned with wreaths of mogrees and cooled with rose water". They would retire to this room, decorated with all sorts of painting, to smoke their Hooka or pass time with a "favourite from the harem".[1] He writes that the room for receiving guests was generally covered with Persian carpets round which were placed cushions of different shapes and sizes, of elegant covers of "gold and silver Kincob, or of scarlet cloth embroidered".[2] At Surat, Grose observed two main decorations in the rooms of the aristocratic buildings—European-looking glasses hung by the wall, and sofas on which they "sat cross-legged".[3] Twining gives us an idea of the dignified reception accorded to him by the Governor of Delhi at his palace, and some of the items of furniture:

> "The servants of the palace, in consequence of orders they had received, now brought me, on large waiters of silver, the Pandan, Utradan, and Golabdan, and Chougurrahs, or trays, of Colfy . . . . Rose water was next sprinkled upon me from an elegant silver vessel having a long neck, perforated with holes at the end."[4]

The account given by Ali informs us of many details of Indian furniture. The space between the pillars of the main rooms was covered with coloured bamboo screens—*Chiks*. These blinds were a real comfort, admitting air when let down, and shutting out flies and insects. They also softened the glare of the sun. Over these were hung curtains—*Purdahs* which were generally made of coarse calico and also of woollen clothes. They were ornamented according to individual tastes.[5] The

[1] Forbes: *op. cit., II*, p. 282.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 240-41.
[3] Grose: *op. cit., I*, p. 110.
[4] Twining: *op. cit.*. p. 227.
[5] Ali: *op. cit., I*, pp. 305-06.

floors of the room were first covered with mattings and thick cotton carpets, *Shutteringhies*, "woven in stripes of blue and white, or shades of blue" were spread over them. A white calico carpet was placed over these and people sat on it.[1]

The bedsteads were an important item of Indian bedding. Ali writes about them that they were "pleasant to recline upon" and were of different workmanship. She writes:

"The legs of these bedsteads are in some instances of gold silver-gilt, or pure silver; others have enamel paintings on fine wood."

The inferior ones were of plain varnished and painted wood, carpets, bedsheets, pillows and quilts were other items of the bed.[2] The quilts of the upper strata were made of "silk of the brightest hues, well-wadded and lined with dyed muslin, . . . usually bound with broad silver ribands, and sometimes bordered with gold brocated trimming". Those of the middle classes were of fine chintz, of the lower classes, servants and slaves, of coarse cotton. During winters the use of shawls from Kashmir was popular, but blankets are mentioned for the use of the commoners only.[3] As the usual mode of sitting was on carpets and not chairs, the *Musnads* were an important item. They were of many varieties—of "gold cloth, quilted silk, velvet, fine chintz", and were used along with elbow cushions. They were an important part of the drawing-room equipment of a rich Indian family.[4]

Of household equipment, utensils were an important item. It is mentioned that gold and silver cups were lavishly used by the aristocracy. In the Muslim community, china wares, dishes bowls and basins are also mentioned. Glass, knives, forks, spoons had not, however, been introduced. Meals were served on floors.[5] The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* gives a detailed description of the various utensils and vessels in use in an Indian family.[6]

In these items of furniture, there were no communal peculiarities. According to Buchanan, the Hindus, however, required

[1] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 306. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 307-08. also Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 244.
[3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 308-09.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 309-10. [5] *Ibid.*, pp. 311, 326-31.
[6] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, Appendix, pp. 117-20.

more "apparatus" for their worship. He writes that the carpets and quilts were originally introduced by Muslims as chairs by Europeans. Sheets, mats, *Piris* (stools), etc., were the Hindu items. Among the Hindus, for reasons of purity, the use of china wares, and potter's wares was not popular. For acedic preparations they used "coarse plates and cups made of potstone which absorb oil and greese" instead of the copper vessels.[1] The household articles did not vary widely among different classes. The lower classes had to be, of course, content with cheap improvisations. They could not afford the embellishments and luxuries of elegant bedsteads, carpets or quilts.[2] Of the people in the mountains, skulls of tigers, deer, hogs—trophies of the hunt —are mentioned as an additional part of the household equipment.[3] Among the higher classes, the use of *Punkahs* and *Khus*-curtains are emphasized as chief luxuries. The ordinary fans were large flaps held over the people by slaves or servants, as they sat chatting or taking their meals. Ali writes that in the early 19th century, the ceiling fans "to which a rope is fastened and passed through an aperture in the wall into the verandah had become quite popular with the aristocracy.[4] Of the *Khus*-curtains, Francklin says that throughout India, they "were a luxury common to all persons of distinction".[5] These references to furniture in the contemporary accounts vividly illustrate the sharp differences in the standards of life of different strata. They also do not fail in impressing on our mind that for most of the lower classes, the damp earth was their only bed and nakedness their only companion.

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 698. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 92: [3] *Ibid.*

[4] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 84. According to Hobson-Jobson the *Punkah* was invented by Caliph Mansur, 753-74 A.D. [5] Francklin: *Shah Alum*, p. 124.

*Chapter Seven*

# Recreations and Amusements

IN INDIAN SOCIETY there was no dearth of music, recreation and amusements. The European accounts clearly bring out the fact that there was plenty of leisure and gaiety, feasts and festivals, conjuring tricks and acrobatic shows. The monotony of life was mitigated by festive diversions of varied character and people had enough "time to stand and stare".

## *Religious Amusements*

In the 18th century, religion provided constant source of amusement to society. Almost every temple and sacred shrine had its feasts and festivals recurring at different periods. They drew their faithful flock from distant places and provided diverse entertainments for many days. Forbes tells us that during the "Jatterahs" or religious festivals at the Hindu temples on the banks of the Narbada, people gathered in large numbers, often exceeding "a hundred thousand". At such festivals, apart from the ceremonies of religion, the performances of "the comedians, dancing girls, snake-charmers, jugglers, and those of similar professions" were a substantial entertainment to the people.[1] The tombs of the Muslim saints were also consecrated places of religious congregations. At their anniversary celebrations, they were "splendidly illuminated" and people rushed "with fairest flowers to sweeten the sad grave".[2] In South India, the daily worship in the temples of the higher gods, too, was highly artistic and entertaining. The idols, "richly adorned with jewels and ornamented with flowers", were invoked amidst the melodies of music and gestures of dancing girls.[3] In the account given earlier of the religious life, reference has been made to the fairs at the places of pilgrimage like Hardwar, Kashi and

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 106. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 284.
[3] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 137.

Prayag, which drew pilgrims in thousands from different places. On such occasions, sports, theatrical shows and puppet shows were an important item of amusement.[1] The religious festivals were also a delightful diversion in the life of the lower classes and had a vital social significance. During that period, it was difficult to persuade either a Hindu or a Muslim to attend to his normal work. Even markets were closed and the dull routine of daily life was suspended.[2] These public festivals imparted intensity to community life and inspired hilarity, feasting and social intercourse on a large scale. There was excitement and spirited emulation among all classes. Music and dance cheered the general tone of life; processions, illumined by fireworks and embelished with flags, kept the people in a jovial mood for days together. People spent lavishly, even beyond their means, on celebrations.[3] The gentry delighted in athletic contests and sports,[4] while the enthusiasm of the lower strata manifested itself in wild demonstrations and painful rites.[5] We shall briefly describe the important festivals celebrated throughout the country.

## *Holi*

The Holi festival marked the commencement of the New Year, and was celebrated with great zeal by patricians and plebeians alike. Both the Hindu and the Muslims hailed the dawn of the New Year amidst hysterical outbursts of joy. Many of their amusements appear vulgar and distasteful. Malcolm writes that in Central India for more than eight days the lower classes

[1] Bacon: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 171-74. In his description of the "Mela" at Hurdwar, he writes that in 1819, on account of the rush of pilgrims towards the ghat, about 436 people were "squeered and trampled to death" on one morning. *Ibid.*, pp. 170-71. At the fair he saw "the infatuated multitude" of "every Oriental nation" and "merchandise from every quarter of Asia".

[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 575. Pillai: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 19. *Selections, Calcutta Gazette*, *I*, p. 143.

[3] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 28. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 420-21; *III*, pp. 185-86. Forbes: *op. cit.*. *II*, pp. 451-52.

[4] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 205-06. Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 27-8. Wilks: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 52, footnote.

[5] *Ibid.*, also Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 480; *III*. p. 169.

made merry.[1] Elphinstone refers to the sports "in which all descriptions of people eagerly join", and gives the following account of the festival:

> "Perhaps the chief of these (festivals) is the Holi, a festival in honour of the spring, at which the common people, especially the boys, dance round fires, sing licentious and satirical songs, and give vent to all sorts of ribaldry against their superiors, by whom it is always taken in good part. The great sport of the occasion, however, consists in sprinkling each other with a yellow liquid and throwing a crimson powder over each other's person. The liquid is also squirted through syringes, and the powder is sometimes made up in large balls covered with isinglass, which break as soon as they come in contact with the body. All ranks engage in this sport with enthusiasm and get more and more into the spirit of the contest, till all parties are completely drenched with the red powder that they can scarcely be recognized. A grave prime minister will invite a foreign ambassador to play the Holi at his house, and will take his share in the most riotous parts of it with the ardour of a schoolboy."[2]

This account is almost exactly similar to that given by Broughton about the territories held by Rajput and Maratha Princes.[3] According to Bishop Heber, Holi was "the Hindoo carnival" at which "all kinds of riot and festivity" were common among the Hindus. He had seen a few drunken men in India before but "during all the time of the Hoolee, drunkenness is common among the Hindoos".[4] In Gujarat, Forbes mentions that a favourite diversion, very much similar to that on April 1 in England, was "to send people on errands and expeditions that are to end in disappointment, and raise a laugh at the expense of the person sent".[5] In South India, the feast of Ugadi lasted for about three days and people gave them-

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, pp. 194-95.

[2] Beveridge: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 198.

[3] Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 65-72.

[4] Beveridge: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 198-99. Buchanan writes that Holi was also the most popular religious festival after Durga Puja in Bengal "celebrated chiefly by rude sports and the most indecent songs". Martin: *op. cit*, *III*, p. 170. In the district of Gorakhpur, in Uttar Pradesh, it was considered "the greatest Hindu festival" celebrated on the full moon of Phalgun. *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 480.

[5] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 167.

selves up to wild merry-making. Fire-works were let off, cannons, rockets, and guns were heard on every side. People paid each other visits of courtesy. The princes were in the habit of giving public entertainments to which immense crowd of people resorted. Their entertainments at this occasion resembled the gladiatorial combats of ancient Romans, consisting of combats between animals, between men and animals, and athletic feats. The athletes came from long distances to contend for the prizes. When these sports were over, the princes distributed prizes to the champions according to their skill and strength. At this time, the old accounts of the year were closed. The government servants prepared the revenue accounts for the next year and the cultivators renewed the leases of their farms.[1]

### *Basant*

The accounts mention that in Northern and Central India, the spring festival was a universal celebration. We have observed, in a different context, how the Muslim grandies of Oudh recreated themselves in yellow dresses on the main day. The King held at Lucknow a public *Durbar* in honour of the festival, and arranged different sports and pastimes for the delight of his subjects. The account given by Broughton shows that this festival was very popular in Rajput and Maratha states, and the rejoicings were innocent and decent.[2]

### *Dasahra*

After Holi, the Dasahra and Diwali were the most popular festivals. The Rajputs and Marathas are mentioned as celebrating Dasahra with great pride and keenness. Sanguinary rites characterized their celebrations.[3] This festival was also popular in Bengal. About 1784-85, an Englishman observed the celebrations in connection with this festival at Murshidabad. In the evening the river Ganga presented a delightful scene. The boats of different shapes—*Moor Pankees*, peacock boats, others

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 576-78. [2] Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 36-9.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 129-31. Also Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 194.

long and narrow, of snake-like appearance began to ply wildly in the waters. The wealthy Hindus were seated in them on cushions and carpets. On raised platforms in the boats were the idols of deity prominently displayed, and by their side, a man danced and sung "beating time to the oars of the rowers, ornamented with bells". It was a lively scene of mirth and festivity. The entire city was illuminated throughout the whole night, and music and dancing continued without interruption.[1]

## *Diwali*

The festival of Diwali is also mentioned as a popular religious festival. The *Vaisya* castes especially delighted in expensive illuminations taking place at the close of the festival. On this day they closed their accounts of the past year and started new ledgers. The ceremonies connected with the worship of the Goddess of Wealth, Laxmi, were, however, not characterized by bloody rites. But Malcolm informs us that at this occasion, different communities "enjoy from usage a latitude of gambling for eight days, in which almost all join who come within the vortex of its celebrations".[2] Buchanan mentions a curious rite performed by the Goalas, a caste tending cattle in Bihar—"tie the feet of a pig, and drive their cattle over the wretched animal until it is killed, after which they boil it in the field and eat it".[3]

## *Durga Puja*

The contemporary accounts dwell at length on Durga Puja, the greatest religious festival of the Hindus in Bengal. People are mentioned as wasting much money on the celebrations "performed with much show". The gentry and the wealthy upper classes entertained both Muslims and Europeans.[4] The author of *Araish-i-Mahfil* gives us an account of these:

> "To be brief, people and chiefs of most sects go to their merry-meetings, and enjoy a certain pleasure. They have carpets of all colours spread in every room, and very elegant and clean

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*
[2] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 194. Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 230-31.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 144.
[4] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 95.

ones laid out under the Shamiyanas; glass chandeliers, shades, and candle sticks give a good light in every place; boxes for holding pan and atar, made of gold and silver, are placed in order, and hundreds of trays are filled with flowers, necklaces, and nose-gays; the performers consist of ten or twenty bards, and dancing boys and girls, wearing very nice clothes round their necks."[1]

Stavorinus has given an eye-witness account of the celebration of this festival in a wealthy trader's house at Chinsura in Bengal. It gives an insight into the complex factors which governed the religious life of the 18th century. The worship of the *Lingam* (phallus worship) was the most important part of the festival, and continued throughout the whole night, "from the evening until day-break". It was accompanied by the performances of the dancing girls who kept their eyes "constantly fixed" on the idol. "They danced to the sounds of cymbols, triangles, tom-toms, or little drums, and other musical instruments; and amidst the chanting of hymns, in honour of the gods, whose festival they celebrated." These rites of worship continued for three days, during which time the main hall "was filled with people; it was open to every one; and the guests were plentifully sprinkled with rose-water, from time to time; those of most consideration were annointed, upon their head and hands, with oil of roses". The votaries prostrated themselves from time to time before the idol and "made offerings to it of flowers, perfume, pieces of gold and silver, and even gold and silver coin, which was diligently collected at the termination of the festival by the Bramins, who had the care of this deity".[2] He graphically describes the "solemn sacrifice" made of a young buffalo on the last night:

"A large oblong pit was dug, in the middle of the hall, opposite to the stage, at the upper end, two large stakes were driven into the ground, not far from each other. The buffalo, which was plentifully adorned with flowers, was then put into the pit, and his neck laid between the two stakes, his head being so placed that his eyes were turned towards the niche. If he continues to look steadfastedly at the niche, without turning his head or eyes away from it, it is considered as a peculiarly favourable omen, and a sign that the sacrifice is

[1] *Adrash-i-Mahfil*, p. 95. [2] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 420-21.

agreeable to the goddess; but if the contrary takes place, he turns his head to either one side or the other, it is construed into an evil presage. A cross piece of wood is made fast over the neck, to the stakes, so that the animal cannot lift up its head. Upon this, they pull the buffalo by the tail, as hard as they can, in order to stretch the neck, which is cut through at one stroke by a bramin. The head is laid before the goddess, and the people manifest great joy; but if the bramin be forced to make more strokes than one, it is looked upon as a fatal omen, and occasions much sorrow and consternation."[1]

On the fourth day, all the idols were taken out of the houses and exposed to public view. They were taken out in processions of "great concourse of people" amidst music and dancing. On the banks of the Ganga, these idols, all decorated with large flags, were put in boats, and then the spirits of people rose high—"all emulously strove to evince their joy, by their gestures and expressions". At sunset they were immersed in the water.[2]

These accounts convey to our mind an idea of the light, recreational role of religion in society. It is emphasized that the festivals of the Hindus were endless and their convivialities on these occasions were intense. In Bengal, we observe that the lower classes endeavoured to win the favour of their gods "by being whirled round, while suspended by hooks passed through the flesh of the back". Such demonstrations of the fanatics were an amusement to the backward strata of society.[3] We, however, do not frequently come across such rites of torture in other parts of the country. What is more interesting is the fact that the Muslims joined the Hindus in their public festivals and also celebrated their own with the same earnestness and ostentation.[4] With them the Mohurram was the most exciting religious festival. Ives remarks about Bengal:

"The Moors likewise, . . . are not without their feasts and processions; and are extremely fond of them as well as the Gentoos; particularly, of their Hassan, in memory of the two sons of Ali by Fatima . . . . They carry about a model of the tomb of their ancestors, made of light bamboo and paper finely

[1] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, pp. 422-23. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 423-25.

[3] Martin. *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 169, 557.

[4] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 28. Hodges: *op. cit.*, pp. 35-6. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 474-76.

ornamented, for three days and nights; and are attended by people ridiculously dressed, shouting and dancing to the country music. On the last day of the festival they carry these models into the fields with a kind of funeral procession, and there, by breaking them in pieces, put an end to the ceremony."[1]

Broughton writes how the Taziyas and mock appearances of *Fakirs*, beggars, mendicants made a mockery of the wild scene of crowded processions in mourning at the time of Mohurrum. From his camp in Scindhia's territories, "from the close to the break of day" he heard "the discordant noises of drums, trumpets, and matchlocks, mixed with the beating of breasts, loud sobbing, and half frantic exclamations of the devout Muslims.[2] Under the British rule, much of the communal harmony which characterized the celebrations of these festivals in the 18th century was disturbed. Ali tells us that at the occasion of Mohurrum, the Shias and Sunnis gave full expression to their animosities "hoarded" for the year, and that in the big cities it seldom passed "without a quarrel".[3] The festival of Id, however, retained its old inspiration. The entire Muslim fraternity was unusually gay and happy. The princes offered camels in sacrifices,[4] and in every Muslim home "all is life and joy, cheerful bustle and amusement".[5] On the occasion of Id-ul-Fitr, the New Moon festival, we read of the Nawab of Surat as leading a splendid pocession to the mosque for prayers. The camels and keetle-drums were to be seen all along the crowded road.[6] All accounts emphasize that the Muslims celebrated their festivals just like the Hindus, and amused themselves with music and other entertainments of feasts and sports.[7] Feasting was an important item of most of the festivals and ceremonies connected with religion directly or indirectly. Dubois informs us that in South India, the feast days were utilized in rejoicings and diversions of various kinds. The houses were decorated, the choicest jewels and costumes were worn, and relatives and friends met together and feasted each other in turn.[8] The feasts at the temples were

[1] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 26.
[2] Broughton: *op. cit.*, p. 48. See his account of Mohurrum, pp. 51-5.
[3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 30-2. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 140. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 192.
[6] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*. pp. 179-80. [7] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, Letter No. XI. Hodges: *op cit.*, pp. 35-6. [8] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 575.

also a substantial amusement to society. The dedication of a new temple, the inauguration of an idol were special occasions of sumptuous public feasts. So far as the Brahmans are concerned, society entertained them at feasts on almost all domestic ceremonies. The aristocracy, the wealthy officials and individuals arranged grand public dinner for them, called *Samvaradhanas*. These were interpreted "in the foremost rank of meritorious actions".[1] Sectarian feasts—open to all members of the sect—were also arranged by the upper classes. The lower castes, too, had their feasts, spoken of by Dubois as "disgusting orgies", accompanied by noise, disorder, and constant clamour against the host.[2] He, however, mentions that intoxicating drinks were never used at such feasts, and even to suggest them was likely to be construed as "an insult of the deepest dye".[3] About Northern India, Buchanan writes that social intercourse on these lines was more pronounced among the Muslims. Among the Hindus, it was mostly or marriages, at restoration of caste that the entertainment of feasting was common.[4]

## *Music and Dance*

In his book *Twelve Years Military Adventures in Hindustan 1802-14*, Major Blakiston makes a very misleading assertion about the Indian people that "they have no music in their souls".[5] The other accounts mention music and dancing as the principal means in the pursuit of pleasure in the 18th century. Of the love of people for music, Craufurd writes that they will "spend the whole night in seeing and hearing music". Accord-to him, the Hindus were "naturally cheerful, and are fond of conversation, of play, and of other amusement".[6] Malcolm, who lived for many years in Central India and mixed with the

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 278-79. He writes that when a "Samvardhana" was announced, Brahmans, all men and women, flocked to it from seven or eight miles, sometimes to the number of "over two thousand".

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 279-82. [3] *Ibid.*, p, 283.

[4] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 128.

[5] Blakiston: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 257. To him only one song, Chandah's song from Hyderabad, called after a dancer of that name, had some appeal.

[6] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 281.

people, has left the following note on the popularity of the amusement of music in the rural areas:

> "The peasants of Central India, both male and female, appear a remarkable cheerful race. They are particularly fond of singing; the men, after the labour of the day is over, will sit for hours in circles singing in chorus, or listening to some story, the subject of which is generally religious, and mixed with tales of the former princes, and the deeds of their forefathers. The women all sing; and it is usual to see them returning in groups from a well or river with water for the use of their families, chanting in chorus some favourite song. At the village marriages the women join in dances, and in every other scene of innocent merriment, with a liberty that is not exceeded by the usages of the same class in any part of the world."[1]

Musical entertainments were a necessary feature of every social or religious ceremony, and rural India was especially rich in the wealth of song, folk-lore and dance. The villagers could not afford the ostentatious entertainments of dance-girls and professional musicians. With them the lyre or the lute was not a taboo, and they freely amused themselves by singing and dancing in chorus. Forbes writes that in Gujarat and Bombay Presidency, in the rural areas, it was common for women to dance in small groups at all festivals along the banks of tanks and rivers. He was most impressed with their performances at Dhuboy and writes:

> "These dances were less formal and more active than any I had seen in India, unlike those of the dancing girls, and little resembling the country dance; the tune and figure seem both unstudied; and the songs which accompanied them, like the rhapsodies of the Italian improvisatore, or those of their own Bhauts and minstrels, were all extemporaneous effusions."

These dances reminded him of those of the "modern Greeks" or those that Diana was said to have danced on the banks of Eurotas. The great lady led the dance, and was followed by a band of young girls who "imitate her steps and, if she sings, make up the chorus". Their "extremely gay and lively tunes",

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 198.

their remarkably soft, tender and varied steps, appeared to him "infinitely more agreeable" than an English dance.[1] In the humble labouring classes, singing was the chief relief from the monotony of hard manual toil. The Europeans have observed how the boatmen amused themselves with songs while plying their oars in the coastal waters, and how workers would burst forth into loud strains while handling a tough job.[2]

From contemporary accounts, it appears that orthodox Muslim opinion was not favourably inclined towards music, prohibited as it was by the injunctions of the Qoran. Ali says that it was considered indecorous in either sex to practise music, singing, or dancing. But at all the weddings, social entertainments, and religious festivities of the Muslims, music, vocal and instrumental, was the chief recreation.[3] The Muslim aristocracy at Lucknow taught the female slaves to sing for the amusement of the ladies. As the professional dancing girls were not permitted to demonstrate their art in respectable Muslim families, there flourished another class of female singers and dancers—"Domenie"—of good character. They were "admitted within the pale of Zeenahnah life", and their chaste songs on guitar, "Surringhee", "dholle" and other instruments were very much relished.[4] About the Muslim nobility, the author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* says that they had women trained up for singing and dancing and who were attached life-long to the harem. Many of these were fortunate to rise to the distinctions of chief ladies.[5] The Nawabs are mentioned as especially delighting in the pleasures of music. They had expert violinists to lull them into sleep by "soft, uniform, and frequently repeated sounds".[6] Stretched upon their pleasure-beds in their beautiful gardens, "in the stillness of a starry night", they would listen to melodious songs, and contemplate on "the graceful forms of the surrounding dancers, amid the odoriferous smoke of incense".[7] Dance and music were their favourite recreations.

The cultivation of music as an art does not appear to be a taboo with the Hindus. It is, however, emphasized that only

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp 514-15. [2] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 52-3.
[3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 195-97. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 70.
[4] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 195-97. [5] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, p. 17.
[6] Raymal: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 36-7 [7] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 154.

stringed instruments like Veena were popular with the higher castes. Contact with wind instruments of leather was considered as a pollution and avoided.[1] Such social prejudices did not encourage progress in the fine arts, and Dubois remarks that "though the Hindus much enjoy listening to music, and introduce it freely into all their public and private ceremonies, both religious and social, yet it must be admitted that this charming art is here still in its infancy".[2] Anything like the European dance, in which the two sexes mixed freely, was considered scandalous. Ali says that it offended the modest susceptibilities of the people, and that "a native gentleman would consider himself disgraced or insulted by the simple enquiry—can you dance, sing or play?"[3] Forbes refers to the surprise of the people at Europeans walking in company and dancing together when professional dancers and singers could be had for money.[4] Sir Martin Hunter, too, has clearly stated the popular sentiment in this context as follows:

> "Villagers were very much surprised to see us dance, saying that it was very extraordinary that we, who could afford to have dancing girls, should wish to dance."[5]

## *Nautch*

The European accounts speak of the "nautch" as a very popular amusement in the 18th century. The professional musicians and dancing girls were in great demand in society. Public opinion considered their art as an innocent form of entertainment, a romantic spectacle tempered by sobriety. In 1754, Kindersley wrote that whenever an Indian gentleman had a mind "to compliment a European, he treats him to a nautch".[6] In 1800, the author of the *European in India* also wrote:

> "Nabobs and Soubahs throughout India are in the habit of giving public breakfasts, and of occasionally inviting all the European gentry in their vicinity to grand dinners, nautches or dances, and other entertainments."[7]

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 65-6. [2] *Ibid.*. p. 64.
[3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, 196-97. [4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 330.
[5] Martin Hunter: *Journal*, 1802-14, Ed. by Miss A. Hunter, p. 72.
[6] Kindersley, *Letters*, p. 231.
[7] Doyley: *op. cit.*

On every festivity and joyous celebration, it was a common practice in society to send for a set of the dancing girls and enjoy their performance. About the Hindus and Muslims in Bengal, the Dutch Admiral writes that they delighted "in having women dance before them", that these women were educated in that art from their infancy.[1] Many others mention that the feasts and entertainments of the higher classes were considered unattractive without the "nautch" performances of the professionals.[2] The aristocracy is mentioned as maintaining its own bands for its amusements. To the Frenchman-de Page, the band of the Nawab of Surat appeared "remarkable only for its noise",[3] and Capt. Campbell considered its music as "inelegant, harsh and dissonant".[4] In Indian society, the professional classes specializing in music and dance were a prosperous community. They were patronized by the feudal aristocracy, and were also popular in the European circles. Writing about the "nautch" performances at a Maharaja's palace, Bacon says that "the dress and ornaments, in which she (the chief dancing girl) dressed, were said to be worth 40,000 rupees, about £ 4000 her own property".[5] The reputed dancing girls were coveted at even distant places. The rich, invited from far off places, vied with one another in extravagant expenditure over them, hoping "to get a name among men".[6] Raynal tells us that the dancing girls, "Balliaderes", were in great repute at Surat, and were "even preferred to those beauties of Cassmere who fill the seraglios of Indostan". Their performances were also pleasing to the gods of the Hindu temples.[7] Buchanan, dealing with the district of Bhagalpur in Bihar, says "of music there is an extraordinary abundance". He enumerates the different classes of professionals. The "Mirasins" were the dancing girls most popular with the Muslim gentry, and the "Bais" were for the commoners. The Hindu dancing women were called "Khelonis". The Bhaktiyas, the Daphalis, the Piranis, etc., were those who played on musical instruments during the "nautch".[8]

[1] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 437.
[2] *Ibid.* pp. 437-39. Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 75. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 36-7.
[3] de Page: *Travels Round the World*, *II*, p. 18.
[4] Campbell: *Journey Overland to India*, *III*, p. 124.
[5] Bacon: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 288. [6] *Selections Calcutta Gazette*, IV, p. 370.
[7] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 30-40, 42-3. [8] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 248-49.

Till the end of the 18th century, "the languishing glances, wanton smiles, and attitudes not quite consistent with decency" of the Indian dancing girls were much admired in European society in India. According to many foreigners, they danced and sang well. It was customary for new arrivals to India, ladies and gentlemen, to be entertained at a "nautch" by their friends.[1] Even the strong-headed Anglican Chaplain, Tennant, did not object to this amusement which was especially very popular with the British soldiers.[2] From Sir J. Dolley we learn that during 1778-1785, the exodus of the dancing girls from cities to the European cantonments was very rapid. At this period at Lucknow, "Kaunum was in the zenith of her glory" and she held "in complete subjection... many scores of fine young British officers". Even the aged British officers of the army were the most fervent admirers of her art.[3] It is interesting to study how the "nautch" has been spoken of by Europeans. To many, Indian music could not mean anything more than sound and noise, and the dance was a mere exercise of limbs with no deeper suggestions. This attitude is more conspicuous after the close of the 18th century, when an Englishman, conscious of his political importance, developed strong racial repugnance to Indian arts. Broughton wrote that a "nautch" was not at all an "attractive spectacle", and nothing could be "more deficient in grace than the whole figure of a dancing girl".[4] In 1826, about twenty years after him, Fenton described a dancing girl as "an odious specimen of Hindustanee beauty" making "frightful contortions of her arms, hands, head and eyes. This was her poetry of motion. I could not even laugh at it".[5] To most of the Europeans of the earlier period, the Indian dance was, however, an interesting amusement. Forbes wrote that the stêps of the dancing girls were "not so mazy or active as ours, but more interesting: as the song, the music, and the motions of the dancer, combine to express love, hope, jealousy, despair, and the passions so well known to lovers, and very easily to be understood by those who are ignorant of other languages."[6] According to Stavorinus, the Bengali dancers and musici-

[1] Kindersley: *op. cit.*, p. 231. Cordiner: *A Voyage to India*, p. 120. Hart: *Old Calcutta*, p. 47. [2] Tennant: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 56.
[3] Doyley: *op. cit.* [4] Broughton: *op. cit.*, p. 143.
[5] Fenton: *Journal, 1826-30*, p. 243. [6] Forbes: *op. cit.*; *I*, p. 61.

ans did not "make a disagreeable concert",[1] and that there was something Spanish about their dances. The Indian professional singers and musicians, trained from infancy in their art, acquired great proficiency. Their delicacy, softness and perfection has been highly spoken of by the foreign observers of the later 18th century. "Their dances are", says Raynal, "in general, love pantomimes; the place, the design, the attitudes, the time, the airs, the cadence of these ballets are all expressive of this passion, with all its raptures and extravagancies."[2] The Muslim dress is generally emphasized as their popular costume at a dance performance. The important items of it mentioned by Stavorinus were the "Moorish drawers" reaching down to the heels, fastened round the waist, the "kabay" "made with a small body above, and a flowing petticoat below", tight at the bosom, with sleeves coming down to the hands, the veil of white muslin "with which they conceal their faces from time to time during the dance". They appeared at their best with costumes and ornaments of the nicest quality, taste, and fashion.[3] It will not be out of place to give a description of a "nautch". Here is one from Bacon, which he saw at a Maharaja's palace:

> "The movements of the dance are extremely graceful; we have nothing in England to which I can compare them. At first the action is quiet and expressive of soft delight; then as the dance proceeds, the music rises in tone, and the countenance and gesture grow more animated, suggesting love, then adoration, then alternately, or in accordance with the humour of the song, fear, homage, affection, hatred, and other ardent feelings, until both music and song, ascending in tone and sentiment, inspire the dancers with most passionate gesticulation, speaking the language of fervent love and sometimes even of despair; and this I have more than once seen depicted with a truth we could hardly expect from them. So warmly do the dancers enter into the sport of their own performance that their excitement produces complete suspension of the faculties and they are led away by the old matrons in attendance."[4]

[1] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 437-38. [2] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 41.
[3] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 438, Also Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 41-42. also Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 143-44.
[4] Bacon: *Impressions and Studies*, *II*, p. 286-87.

According to Broughton, the instrumental artistes ranged themselves behind the dancing girl, with their "Tubla" fixed in their girdles, and "munjeera", "little brazen cymbals", in hands.[1]

## *Theatre and Puppet Shows*

Theatrical demonstrations and puppet shows were also interesting public amusements of the 18th century. European accounts refer to the dramatic parties, "travelling actors", "strolling players" visiting villages, and the village audience—men, women and children—sat for whole nights looking at their performances. They were entertained by chief wealthy people and paid out of the village revenues. Malcolm says that in Central India, "the place of exhibition is usually a green near the village; but on particular occasions such as marriages, or festivals, a temporary building is erected".[2] The range of their plays was very wide, from mythological religious themes to cheap satires. The stage was often utilized for focussing the attention of people to the misdeeds of public functionaries, the superior officers of the district, the renters of farms, Potails and other village authorities. "The Raja, his Devan, and all the ministers of his court", says Malcolm, "are frequent objects of ridicule with actors in Central India; but what gives most delight to the peasant is a play in which the scenes he is familiar with are exhibited. The new manager or renter of a district, for instance, is exhibited on the stage with his whole train of officers and attendants: every air of consequence is assumed by the new superior, every form of office is ostensibly displayed; the Potails and villagers are alternately threatened and cajoled, till they succeed in pacifying the great man by agreeing to the terms, or by gaining one of his favourites, who appears in the back part of the scene whispering and taking bribes". Such themes were admired by the rural population with "acclamation".[3] Forbes writes of "the very humorous and wily dialogues" of these "strolling comedians" and their innocent representations which did not offend the sentiments of "piety, morality or delicacy". From his account it appears that theatrical performances on a large scale were not fashionable.

[1] Broughton *op. cit.*, pp: 143-44.
[2] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 196-97.
[3] *Ibid.*

Big theatrical organizations were non-existent. Drama, however, appeared to be a popular rural amusement. The Indian plays were mostly innocent, and in no way injurious to social morality. With plays like *Shakuntala* of Kalidas, the stage was certainly a school of "virtue".[1] Heyne admits that the stories of their plays were drawn from ancient epics or sacred works like the *Ramayana* and *Bhagwat*, or were bitter satires representing ministers of state as "avaricious, selfish, intriguing". He credits Indian actors with much "wit and satire"[2] and tells us that in the Northern Circars, "women of the dancing caste" were introduced as "actresses", but in Mysore, Brahman boys were employed "to act the female parts" which they performed with much skill.[3] Dubois rather writes contemptuously of their art, "disgusting postures" and utterances full of "filthy nonsense", that their shows were "exactly suited to the taste and comprehension of the stupid crowd which forms the audience".[4] But if we believe Malcolm, then in the art of mimicry, the Indian actor was "hardly inferior in talent. . . to some of the most celebrated performers in England".[5]

There is no doubt that these plays were a source of delight to the people, and that the average Indian mind revelled in theatrical demonstrations. This is clear from an amusing anecdote narrated by Innes Munro, which shows how people coming in intimate contact with foreigners delighted in dramatic performances ridiculing the eccentricities of their life. In the Black Town of Madras, the Duboshes appear to have often amused themselves round a table, "each assuming the name and character of his European master in the most ridiculous manner imaginable". He applauds their style of mimicry which was effective and forceful.[6]

Besides plays, there were other allied recreations like the puppet shows, pictorial shows, etc., mostly of juvenile interest. The European accounts do not throw much light on them. Capt. Williamson's account refers to the entertainment of "Kautpootlis"—wooden infants—which was popular throughout India. He considers it superior to "Mr. Punch and his Wife," as ex-

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 78-9.
[2] Heyne: *op.cit.*, p. 88. [3] *Ibid.* [4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 74-5.
[5] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 196, footnote.
[6] Innes: *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

hibited throughout England", in "far greater variety, both in the subject and in the several dramatis personae". The puppet performances were displayed in candle-light in an open space or tent or carpet.[1] A member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, who toured through Bundelkhand into the central parts of Maratha dominions in 1806, refers to photographic representations as popular in the Deccan. "We were here (in Berar) entertained with an exhibition, common in the Deccan", says he, "a series of pictures, figuring the fabulous horses of the Bharat. The exhibition was accompanied by unmelodious songs and with the music of a drum, and of an instrument consisting of a brass plate, on which a waxed stick is held perpendicularly, and rubbed, to excite vibrations on the plate."[2]

These references amply demonstrate the popularity of theatre and allied shows in Indian society. But the people who specialized in them and other amusements—jugglery, rope-dancing, acrobats, etc.—were of definite castes, not considered respectable in society. They were, however, looked on with awe and admiration by the credulous masses; and they travelled in small groups "from country to country to find patrons or dupes". The other classes of this recreational group of society, whose demonstrations were very popular in the 18th century, were those of jugglers, acrobats, snake-charmers, etc. According to Dubois, these "imposters" abounded in Indian society. He writes:

> "They are regarded as magicians and sorcerers, as men versed in witchcraft and all the occult sciences, and are viewed with fear and distrust while the hatred in which they are held is much greater than is accorded in Europe to people of the same description."[3]

## *Jugglers, Acrobats, Snake-Charmers, etc.*

The European accounts refer at length to the Indian jugglers whose talents and feats were applauded in European circles. We also learn of two adults and a boy boarding the *Monarch* at Madras for the English Capital in the early part of the 19th century. They demonstrated their art at Pall Mall three times

[1] Williamson: *op. cit.*, p. 476.
[2] *Asiatic Annual Register—1806*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 25.
[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 73-4.

a day and created a sensation. They swallowed swords and put to shame the English artistes of their class who could only manage lumbling, leaping and rope-dancing[1] The Indian jugglers are described as wandering "players or actors" of the castes of Nutts "mostly professing the Muslim Faith". They played on various instruments, sung, danced and lumbled and the latter two accomplishments were popular with their women. They were of remarkable athletic build, "nimble and adroit in every kind-of-sleight of hand, practising juggling in all its branches".[2]

At the public wells, at various halting places in the countryside, they were "a never-failing source of public amusement".[3] Foreigners have paid rich tributes to their art. In the opinion of Doyley, it would "occupy folios to enumerate" all the tricks and trickery of this "itinerant race of villains". They were the complete masters of their bewildering art.[4] According to Forbes, they "performed feats of legerdemain superior to any I have seen in England; the most conspicuous was generally one of these women mentioned by Fryer, who held nine gilded balls in play, with her hands and feet, and the muscles of her arms and legs, for a long time together, without letting them fall".[5] Many could pass "the blades of swords, about twenty inches by two, down their throats up to the very hilts".[6] To Craufurd, many of their tricks appeared as performed by means of conjurations".[7] Among the various "gymnastic exhibitions", the following may be mentioned:

Drawing yards of threads from the noses and ears of spectators, cutting their turbans into pieces and joining them again, changing eggs to chickens, mango stones into growing bushes, bearing the ripe fruit, making pigeons lay eggs.

All these are mentioned as commonplace performances confined to "the lower orders of this class of vagabonds". Among their extraordinary feats may be mentioned somersets and capers made with wonderful agility, crossing elephants and

[1] *Selections, Calcutta Gazette, IV*, p. 352.

[2] *Asiatic Annual Register—1803*, Account of Nutts—Bazegurs by Capt. David Richardson, "Characters", pp. 44-52.

[3] Forbes: *op. cit., II*, p. 78. [4] Doyley: *op. cit.* xviii.

[5] Forbes: *op. cit., II*, p. 78. [6] Doyley: *op. cit.* [7] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 327.

camels, throwing and catching spears, jumping through a frame supporting a dozen cut glasses and many other arduous exercises requiring extreme caution and delicacy.[1] It is difficult to refer to the lengthy references about the Indian jugglers in European accounts which are all almost similar. It would be appropriate to close this subject with an account from Twining:

> "After dinner today some of the celebrated jugglers were sent for, for my amusement, and much surprised me by their extraordinary dexterity. One of them threw a heavy stone nearly as high as the ceiling, and then stepping under it, caught it without seeing it fall, on the back of his neck, where it lodged. It was, however, an unpleasant exhibition, as the man must have been seriously injured had the stone fallen upon his head, as seemed very possible. A prettier trick followed. Some powder being sprinkled upon the bare arm of one of the performers, instantly assumed another brilliant colour. One man supported a small dome or cupola upon several sticks, about fourteen inches long, converging to his chin, removing them one after another till two alone were left, upon which the dome remained balanced. Another introduced a blunted sword, eighteen inches long, down his throat . . . . The exhibition of these and numerous other tricks concluded by my having a few of the coins of the country put into my hand, and being desired to squeeze them hard, which I did, until the head of a snake forced itself between my fingers, to the great amusement of the company."[2]

## *The Snake-Charmers*

The snake-charmers of India, too, were a wonderful tribe, and this country, abounding in snakes of many species and the most venomous sting, needed them badly. They were reputed for their art of snake-baiting. Music was the wand with which they lulled their victims into captivity. They remind us of Meda who is said "to have charmed, by the melody of her voice, the dragon which guarded the golden fleece", and recall to our mind the lines of Dryden's translation of Virgil:

> *His wand and holy words the viper's rage,*
> *And venom'd wound of serpents could assuage.*[3]

[1] Williamson: *op. cit.*, pp. 473-74. [2] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 57-8.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit., II*, pp. 21-2.

By their art they tamed the dreadliest of reptiles, pulled out their teeth and stings, taught them "to dance and leap" to the tune of their "rustic pipe or violin". Their craft provided ample fund of amusement to the admiring spectators. Innes makes interesting remarks on it:

"It is truly surprising to behold how charmed these creatures are with a sound of any instrument, but particularly the bag-pipe, raising their heads with seeming joy and moving their bodies in concord with the musical notes. As the time quickens, they appear more and more delighted; and at last get into such an ecstasy that you see them extend their beautiful bells, and quicken the motion of their heads, whilst their eyes sparkle with increased lustre. These gentlemen, whose residence was next to the 73 regiment, used often to allege, in a jocular mannar, that our bag-piper drew every snake in the country to his neighbourhood by the charms of his music; which was certainly the case, for he has often discovered them dancing round his feet, whilst he entertained the soldiers with a few Highland reels."[1]

We learn that the English camp in Scindhia's territories was at one time "pestered with snakes, scorpions, and a large species of yellow spider". They were cleared with the help of the snake-charmers "who will take up the most venomous snakes, and allow them to creep about their persons, with impunity". They pretended to be gifted with supernatural powers, certain special charms by which they could render such dangerous creatures quite tame and harmless.[2]

## *Gymnastics*

In certain European accounts, it has been emphasized that Indian climate did not encourage active sports and exercises. Consequently indolence has been spoken of as a prominent trait of Indian character. "The natives of the torrid zone are not fond of exercises," says Forbes,[3] and Innes dwells on the

[1] Innes, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

[2] Broughton: *op. cit.*, p. 139. Similarly, scorpions were "rendered innocent by pinching their tales just below the sting; which deprives the animal of the power of darting it forward."

[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 60.

"excessive laziness of the natives". "Such is their delight in sleep that they have not a spare moment which is not devoted to Morpheus, throwing themselves down to rest with the greatest facility in any busy corner".[1]

No generalization can, however, be true of India as a whole and its people. We learn of many classes with whom active sports and exercises were a profession, and many to whom the "tended field" was the scene of never-ending excitement. In India, from times immemorial, all sorts of athletic exercises, gymnastic feats, and sports have flourished, and the accounts of the 18th century, too, show that they were a substantial amusement to society.[2] Forbes admits that wrestling, boxing and similar active exercises were in great repute with the people of India. He describes a lively contest of *Pahelwans* (wrestlers) in the Concan, "where a prodigious number of spectators surrounded the square". Dressed in "white turbans and short drawers, with a strong cotton sash, bound tight several times round the loins, and passing between the thighs," four combatants entered the square "with a brisk bounding step, and a shrill yell", all large "full-bodied men", made a respectable salutation to the audience and retired. They were followed by their rivals, "tall, lank, and bony, with much darker complexions, and a graver deportment than the former", "made their obeisance" and withdrew. Afterwards the contest began which consisted of wrestling, boxing and other feats: "in boxing, one hand was guarded by a case of horn or wood, with a convex protuberance over every knuckle; they commenced the attack by raising the hand unarmed in the attitude of beckoning: with the other they strike desperate blows, particularly at the fingers of their antagonists, when attempting to catch hold of them." Such feats and exercises were encouraged by the Indian princes and governments who regularly paid people to train others.[3]

Such athletic contests were regularly arranged, says Dubois, by the princes of South India on solemn occasions. The competitors came from long distances "to contend for the prizes". In

[1] Innes: *op. cit.*, p. 67. also Orme *op. cit.* pp. 407-08. Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 255.
[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 578.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 116-17. He speaks of the Maratha government affording patronage to such sports.

South India, the caste of Jetti mostly specialized in wrestling; its people were trained from their youth in this art. His account also shows that wrestling in the 18th century was an awful, exciting spectacle: "the champions put on gloves studded with sharp pieces of horn. They fight almost naked, and before coming to close quarters dance about in threatening attitudes. Then they close furiously and deal heavy blows on each other's heads with their murderous gloves. Needless to say, blood flows freely. When they have had enough of this, they seize each other round the body and fall struggling to the ground, when they tear each other like wild beasts". This "disgusting spectacle", says he, inspired genuine applause of the audience.[1] Wilks, the contemporary historian of South India, says that Mysore was one country where "the institution of the athletic (Jetti) has been preserved on its ancient footing". The Jettis were ranged into five classes "and the ordinary prize of victory is promotion to a higher class. There are distinct rewards for those of the first class and in their old days they are promoted to be the masters of the feat." He has given a comprehensive account of their "strange" combats. On occasions of festivals, their contests were a regular entertainment of society, "and perhaps the whole world does not produce more perfect forms than these which are exhibited at these interesting but cruel sports", says he.[2]

Along with such contests and exercises, we find numerous other types of martial exercises popular with classes which looked to the army for their career. In the use of the arrows, pikes, and flint-locks, the Polygars of South India, resembling "the European barons of the Middle Ages", were very expert.[3] In the troubled period of the later half of the 18th century, they carried their guerrilla warfare from their fortified retreats in the mountains and jungles, and disturbed the tranquillity of a greater part of the peninsula.[4] Likewise the Rajputs, the Sikhs, the Afghans, and Marathas are mentioned as daring soldiers expert in handling the different weapons of warfare. Dubois writes that in Indian society, there were expert "fencing masters" who gave instruction in the exercises of the bows and arrows,

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 578. [2] Wilks: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 52-3, footnotes.
[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 684-85. [4] *Ibid.*

the pikes and the daggers, the swords and the spears.[1] Of the martial elements in the population of Central India, Malcolm states that they passed the "greater part of their time in training and exercising" their horses, and learning the use of the spear. They studied the use of the swords under "competent teachers" and "practise with the matchlocks till they come to great perfection". They also "improve their activity and strength by gymnastic exercises".[2] Ali has given a good account of the martial exercises popular with the Muslims of the Northern India. These strengthened "the muscular strength of the corporeal frame". The exercise of "moghdurs" like the "club of Hercules", used in pairs "each weighing from eight to twenty pounds", brandishing "in various ways over the head, crossed behind, and back again" was quite popular. This exercise put in motion the entire frame particularly "strengthening the muscles and opening the chest". "The young men who are solicitous to wield the sabre with effect and grace", she writes, "declare this practice to be of the greatest service to them in their sword exercise: they go so far as to say, that only they use the sword well who have practised the moghdur for several years."[3] At their sword exercises, they practised "the stroke on the hide of a buffalo, or on a fish called rooey, the scales of which formed an excellent coat of mail . . . sufficient to turn the edge of a good sabre". Young men of good family practised the art of lancing as an exercise, and common men practised it for eligibility to military service. Without it they could not be good horsemen. People also practised on the bows and arrows though they had "greatly diminished as a weapon of defence."[4] In contemporary accounts, we also find mention of animal fight frequently arranged by the ruling princes for their amusement. About Asaf-ud-Daula, we learn that he was very fond of giving public breakfasts which were often followed by elephant-fights.[5] Colonel Champion gives an account of an animal fight at Calcutta amongst different creatures like elephants, buffaloes, camels and rhinoceros.[6] With the Mughal princes, the animal contests were very popular, but aristocratic taste for them appears to have declined in the 18th century. In the writings of the

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 689-90.
[2] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 195.
[3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 17.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-8.
[5] Valentia: *op. cit.*, pp. 167-68.
[6] Spear: *op. cit.*, p. 39.

18th century they do not receive any prominence. With the lower classes, something similar to these but with pet animals appears to be a frequent amusement. About the middle of the century, a foreigner observes that cock-fighting was popular in Bengal:

> "The natives seem to be keen cockers, as I have seen them standing in rings round two cocks, fighting with the greatest eagerness and anxiety in their countenances as if deeply concerned in the result."[1]

## *Outdoor Recreations*

About Indian people it has been observed that walking was not popular as a recreation. "Walking is by no means considered a pleasing recreation", says Forbes,[2] and Ali writes that besides "plebeian", "few ever walk who can maintain a conveyance".[3] People of the higher classes would stir out riding on horses or in chariots driven by "white oxen". Palanquin was another most popular luxury with officers and men of higher strata. It is mentioned as a mode of conveyance "unknown in Europe".[4] Hunting and shooting were, however, quite popular in the period. In a country like India with its jungles and wild forests, rich in animals like tigers, deer, porcupines, etc., its rivers full of alligators, serpents and fish of every variety, hunting was naturally a popular diversion. The people of Concan in South India are mentioned as keen sportsmen forming hunting parties with dogs.[5] The nobility—princes and chiefs, Muslims and Hindus with the exceptions of Brahmans—were especially fond of the diversion of hunting the tigers.[6] Forbes has elaborately described the various modes adopted by sportsmen in Gujarat for hunting tigers, antelopes, porcupines, etc. Big game shooting was most popular with the aristocracy and was conducted on elephants or from *Machans* (platforms). He mentions tiger shooting in parties riding on elephants.[7] The shooting of wild animals with elephants and beaters was a favourite Mughal sport which continued till the 18th century. Europeans adopted it from Indians. In 1798 Wellesley took over the entire hunting establishment of Sultan Tipu,

[1] *Bengal, Past and Present 1933*, 45, p. 106. [2] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 60.
[3] Ali: *op. cit., II*, pp. 16-7. [4] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 60.
[5] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, pp. 109-10. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 170.
[7] *Ibid.* pp. 170-76.

which included tigers and leopards.[1] For the pleasure of their European guests, the Indian princes frequently organized elaborate shooting programmes. Sir Martin Hunter writes of the Nawab of Arcot that he went out shooting attended "with a wonderfully large retinue"—"a net about a mile long was stretched outside of a jungle, supported by poles of 8 feet high every 5 or 6 yards. This net was made of very strong cord as thick as my finger". When the Nawab arrived on an elephant, about a thousand *Polygars* (wood-men) made inside the woods "a most hideous noise, firing off matchlocks, sounding horns and beating drums. The terrified animals—deer, boar, jackals, hyenas, foxes, hares, and even tigers—were driven into the net and shot. "I was much surprised", writes Sir Martin, "they did not shoot one another; a regiment could not have kept up a more constant fire for nearly an hour."[2] Ali writes that with Muslims pigeon shooting was also a favourite amusement, though the Hindus held it "criminal" to shoot innocent birds like crow, "or even the meanest insect".[3]

Swimming is also mentioned as a popular recreation and was practised by many as a profession for earning their livelihood. To Bacon, it appeared to be a "thriving trade" and from his accounts it appears that there were something like regular clubs for training young men in batches of thirty or forty in this art, "of their astonishing activity and movements in water". This was a useful exercise for training of muscular strength.[4]

## *Indoor Recreations*

There was no dearth of games which people enjoyed within the walls of their residence. Ali contemptuously refers to them as "modes of trifling away valuable time", played by cards and cowries. Her dislike of them was so strong that she does not even mention their names.[5] The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* mentions many of them. With the respectable classes, "*Shutranj*" "*Chowsur*", "*Chowpur*", "*Gwean-Chowsur*", "*Gunjeefa*" or "*Tas, Puncheesee*", "*Lyay*" were very popular. Among the vulgur "*Taq-*

[1] Monson and Gower: *Memoirs of Capt. G. Elers*, p. 103.

[2] Martin and Hunter: *op. cit.*, p. 66-7. [3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 31-32.

[4] Bacon: *op. cit.*, pp. 312-13. [5] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 82.

*Jooft*", "*Nukkha-Mooth*" or "*Bhur-Mooth*", "*Mudrunggum*" were in repute. There were many for the amusements of children. In Muslim circles, after chess, the game of *Puncheesee* appears to be very popular.[1] Ali says that even the ladies of the *Zenana* amused themselves with these "games of chance" like dice, and "chowsur" played on carpets.[2] Gambling too was not unknown to Indian society, but was not so general as in European society. Islam prohibited all such practices as "unholy".[3]

There were various other amusements such as taming birds like parrots, bulbuls, etc. At Patna, parrots of the species of Kajla and Imrat-bhela were bred "in great quantities, and if anyone gets one of them and teaches it, then it learns to speak, and talks very quickly and well".[4] Badshah Begum of Oudh kept sixteen attendants to look after the favourite parrot of Munna Jan. During her captivity it was restored to her when people learnt "that she wept most bitterly at its loss".[5] The Bulbul, the Persian nightingale and "the bird of a thousand songs", was also people's favourite. This bird, with its "pleasing note," its plumage "variegated by shades of brown and white, with a black tuft upon the head, and some feathers of a bright scarlet near the tail", was "the theme of many sweet melodious songs of the Oriental poets. Of the Oriental ornithology the bird has rightly been spoken of as the most delightful specimen.[6] Parrots, too, are mentioned as being loved and tamed. "Some are brought from different parts of the world at an enormous expense," writes Ali, and they were kept in bamboo nests erected on the flat roofs of houses. At the rise and setting of the sun, it was a diversion to feed them and "give them a short airing". If they returned with some others, the latter were treated as "lawful prize forever" "unless his neighbour wishes to redeem

[1] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, Appendix VI, pp. Lii-Liii. About "puchisi" Bacon writes: "A favourite game among the natives of India, played upon a chequered ground, with the small shells called cowries. So madly infatuated are they with this game that a man will frequently gamble away his month's pay at a sitting." It was quite popular with the lower classes. *Impressions and Studies*, p. 342, footnote.

[2] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, P. 82. [3] *Ibid.* p. 83.

[4] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 82. [5] *Badshah Begum.*

[6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 34.

the captives by a price, or by an exchange of prisoners". Among gentlemen, such occasions were "proofs of good breeding and civility;" amongst the vulgar, occasions of conflict and collision.[1]

For people of tender and young age, we find a different category of amusements and sports of a sedentary as well as active nature. The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* mentions about thirty children's plays; many like "Gillee", "Kabuddi", "Jharbandra" subjected players to active exercise.[2] Kite-flying was a very popular juvenile amusement and even the adults participated in it. Williamson describes the making of kites and says that in the big cities "thousands of these kites are seen floating in the air, to the great amusement of their respective owners, and indeed of the spectators. Its contests were especially very interesting. The flat top of the houses were the usual places from where the kites were flown, almost to dive deep into the skies above. Ladies enjoyed the scenes from their enclosed compounds, on the roofs and terraces of their buildings".[3]

## *Recitations, Stories, Picnics, etc.*

People's love of recitations of poems and stories was also an interesting social recreation. We find that they delighted in the recitals of the heroic deeds of their ancestors. The Bhats and Charuns in Central India counted a respectable community and, like the minstrels of Europe of the days of chivalry, they amused people by recitals from mythological legends. Their own compositions like the "old ballads in Europe" were a record of the deeds of renowned warriors, accounts of victories or tragic events in the past. They were attached to every Hindu princely family and court. They attended their chiefs on all important occasions and visits of ceremony, proclaimed aloud their titles and virtues "in hyperbolic and figurative language".[4] In South India, people belonging to the Batti castes were public minstrels, who com-

[1] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 15-6.

[2] *Qanoon-i Islam*, Appendix *VIII*, pp. LIV-LVII.

[3] Williamson: *op. cit.*, pp. 189-91.

[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 377, also Malcolm: *op. cit*, *II*, p. 132. Malcolm says that the murder of a Bhat was an unpardonable, heinous crime as also to shed a Charun's blood. *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 132-34.

posed "the most extravagant eulogies" for the amusement of the aristoracy.[1] The Muslim aristocracy, particularly the ladies, were very much interested in listening to the fables and tales similar to the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments*. Ali writes that in big families there were female companions who would amuse their mistresses with interesting stories while they would retire into their sleeping beds. "When the lady is fairly asleep the story is stayed, and the companion resumes her employment when the next nap is sought by her mistress." The gentlemen indulged in this amusement with the same keenness and had favourite slaves relating them delightful stories.[2]

We also come across a few references to picnics as a pleasant recreation of the people in the 18th century. Grose writes about the upper classes at Surat that in the summer season "they went on picnic with their families" to their gardens outside the city. This recreation became rare in the later 18th century on account of "the foraging parties of the Marathas".[3] Forbes also makes a similar observation:

> "The Asiatics love to retire with their women and children to some cool spot near a river or tank, shaded by the friendly banian tree, or spreading mango; there they enjoy that sort of indolent repose which they are so fond of; and partake of an innocent repast of herbs and fruits, on the verdant carpet."[4]

The Hindus were very fond of banyan tree, nature's "magnificent pavilion" affording cool shelter to weary travellers, described by Milton in *Paradise Lost*. Like the gymnosophists of the ancient age, the Brahmans are mentioned as spending much of their time "in religious solitude under its shade" in Gujarat.[5] The rich classes of every community, Hindu, Muslim and Parsee, were ever in the habit of amusing themselves by retiring to their gardens and entertaining their friends with music and "nautch". The women were, of course, precluded from such convivialities.[6]

A study of the popular amusements of society clearly shows

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 279. [2] Ali: *op. cit. II*, pp. 81-2.
[3] Grose: *op. cit*, *I*, pp. 110-11. [4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 60-1.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 15, 18; also Osbec: *Voyage to China and the East Indies, II*, pp. 171-72. [6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 61.

that puritanism was not considered as a school of social virtue. Both the young and the old, the rich and the poor freely drew upon the copious sources of mirth in their leisure time. The athletic exercises and recreations popular in society also point to the fact that the physical training of the youth was not neglected. The illuminations in the cities on the occasions of various festivals, the processions and exhibitions of idols, and various other amusements were the most pleasing relaxations and provided a contrast to the insipid and dull life of the lower strata of society. The laxities which prevailed on certain occasions of social enjoyments, too, were a necessity in the life of the people whose normal conduct in society was regulated by strict standards of morality.

*Chapter Eight*

# Morality, Etiquette and Behaviour

IT IS DIFFICULT to draw an accurate picture of the general character of people, their ideals and outlook on life from the vague and conflicting references to them in the European accounts. The 18th century was an age of transition in which the old order was imperceptibly fading out. The checks exercised by caste and religion were loosening. The wave of crime and licence, too, was gradually assuming frightful proportions. But society was not swept off from its old anchors. At no period in the 18th century is it possible to look for a radical transformation in any phase of social life. The standards of morality and behaviour retained their former validity and vigour. In this chapter we shall try to cover both the bright and dark aspects of the life of people in so far as we are enlightened on them by the observations of the European critics.

## *General Remarks*

The general trend of most of the missionary accounts of the later period is most damaging to the notion of Indian character. The missionaries like Claudius Buchanan, David Brown, Henry Martyn, Kerr, Corrie and Duff took delight in vilifying the people "under the blackest and most odious colours". They indiscriminately branded them with every vice. Most of these distinguished clergymen, however, returned to England with fortunes made in India ranging from £20,000 to £50,000. They themselves were not free from the lust for gold which had seized their other countrymen like a hysterical infatuation.[1] There are, however, many accounts which give us an idea of the general decency and purity of life in Indian society. People like Warren Hastings, William Jones, Colebrooks, Malcolm, Munro, Elphinstone, etc., admired Indian character, and some of them were

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 145-46, p. 205.

not in favour of unrestricted admission of Europeans into Indian society. They feared that "no laws enacted from home could prevent them from committing acts of licentiousness of every kind with impunity".[1] The early harbingers of European culture in India were mostly men of wild passions and freelance habits. They became odious to Indian society which had a sensitive conscience for organized moral life. In South India, which was the stronghold of Hinduism, people looked on Europeans with horror on account of their unclean habits, their indiscreet indulgence in low-caste concubinage, and wine and food of every kind. They were considered "as barbarians totally ignorant of all principles of honour and good breeding".[2] The people of India were conscious of their moral and cultural superiority over the foreigners and Christianity made a poor impression on their mind. Forbes writes that the Brahmans looked on the Europeans as grossly materialistic people, "irreligious, sceptical infidels".[3] In his *Letters on the State of Christianity in India*, Dubois bitterly complains that during "thirty-two years of confidential and quite unrestrained intercourse among the natives of India, of all castes, religions and ranks", when he lived like them, behaved like them, his efforts at Christianizing them were entirely abortive. Everywhere the seeds sown by him fell "upon a naked rock" and "instantly dried away". According to him, the chief cause of the failure of Christian missionary activity was the increasing infiltration of Europeans and India's growing acquaintance with their life and habits.[4] The conquest of the country by Europeans, he thought, was a disastrous blow to Christianity, "having witnessed the immoral and disorderly conduct of the Europeans who then overran the whole country, the Hindus would have no more of a religion which appeared to have so little influence over the behaviour of those professing it ... and the prejudice against Christianity has gone on increasing steadily day by day, as the people became more familiar with Europeans, until it finally received its death blow".[5] Only a microscopic section of the lowest strata mixed with them on

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 145-46.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 307-08. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 314.

[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 145, 153.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. vi-vii.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 302-03. also pp. 11-2.

intimate terms. Society on the whole considered them as despicable "firingis" whose touch was contamination, whose breath was vile and whose company was dreadful.[1] The Christian religion, which was before "an object of indifference", became by the close of the century "an object of horror", of contempt. "The very name of Christian carries along with it the stain of infamy", he writes, "and association with a Christian became almost a taboo in South Indian society".[2] During the sixty years preceding 1820, very few conversions were made, and Christianity as a missionary religion had almost failed. Many of those who had accepted it were fast renouncing it.[3] Even the enthusiastic Vice-Provost of the College of Fort William founded by Wellesley, Claudius Buchanan admitted that "whenever the Mahomedan finds his religion touched he grasps his dagger".[4] Major Scott Waring of the Madras army does not mince matters and ably argues that the mistake of the missionaries was in holding the belief that they were civilizing the "heathens" who were already a highly civilized people; "they were so, as Burke truly said, while we were yet in the woods".[5]

Dubois has at length discussed the question: "Is it the Hindoos or ourselves who stand in need of reform ?" It will not be out of place to follow his arguments as they throw light on the high standards of public morality in the country. In his opinion life in India was free from the "dissoluteness of European towns like London or Paris which reckoned no less than forty thousand prostitutes who keep public shops of infamy", that even Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were not "such an extensive sink of corruption". Crimes and social vices of every kind were more prevalent in Europe than in India. The European cities and towns were "filled with thieves, sharpers, pickpockets, swindlers, gamblers, forgers, false coiners, and other knaves of every description, most of them happily unknown" to India. Their high roads were infested by "robbers, murderers and assassins", and every kind of crime flourished to an alarming extent.[6] He asks his countrymen, "you boast of

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 302-03, also pp. 11-2.
[2] *Ibid.* [3] *Ibid.*, p. 303, also Valentia: *Travels in India, I*, p. 364.
[4] Waring: *op. cit.*, p. xxiv. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[6] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 153-54.

your pure and refined manners, but how comes it that habitual drunkenness is so prevailing among the lower ranks of your community". The European soldiers and sailors abused their freedom with a vengeance. Their indecent behaviour was disgusting even "to the vile pariahs" of Indian society, the very low caste. The conduct of the Indian sepoy was dignified. He very seldom gave offence to the rules of social propriety and morality either in his private or public life.[1] Among themselves, the hospitality of the Indian people knew no bounds. Assistance to people seeking their help was not wanting. A "wealthy Hindoo considers himself as the depository, or the distributor, rather than the proprietor of his fortune", he writes, "so greatly prone is he to acts of charity and benevolence".[2] Monetary transactions in Indian society were not dependent on "written bonds" or other vouchers and it was very uncommon to find a debt contracted in privacy denied even in distress. Servants entrusted with large sums of money would move hundreds of miles away to make purchases for their masters and embezzlements were rare. Money and jewels deposited with relations under necessity of emigration were left untouched "although entrusted to the charge of persons who were themselves living in a state of distress".[3] The women of the Hindus, so much misrepresented abroad by missionaries like Rev. Ward as chattles reeling under the tyranny of their husbands, enjoyed complete confidence of their husbands. They were the sole guardians of family property and managed the different interests of their families. If they were unacquainted with needle-work, they utilized their leisure in the useful arts of spinning and embroidery, They seldom wasted their time in "inanity or idleness" at card-tables and were all the time busy with their innocent pursuits enlivening their monotony by decent songs or "playing and prattling with their children".[4] They had perfect liberty of participation in public amusements and religious celebrations of society.[5] The Hindu home was the very ideal of domestic happiness. The Hindu mothers were the very idols of filial tenderness.[6]

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 154-58. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 158-59.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 161-63. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 182-83, 194.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 194-96. [6] *Ibid.*, pp. 202-03.

In this strain, Dubois writes about the superior standards of social morality in India, where an active organized public opinion checked crime and lawlessness in society. Others, whose statements we have had occasion to refer in the course of this book, vouchsafe the accuracy of his statements. Forbes reflects on the inadequacy and superfluity of the British laws to Indian society where many classes like the Rajputs had a high sense of duty and honour.[1] Malcolm advocates close contacts of Europeans with Indians and writes:

> "I have seen and heard much of our boasted advantages over them, but cannot think that, if all the ranks of the different communities of Europe and India are comparatively viewed, there is just ground for any very arrogant feeling on the part of the inhabitants of the former."[2]

According to him, many weaknesses in the Indian national character were due to "misrule and oppression" of their feudal governments but he observes:

> "I do not know the example of any great population, in similar circumstances, preserving, through such a period of changes and tyrannical rule, so much of virtue and so many good qualities as are to be found in a great proportion of the inhabitants of this country."[3]

Warren Hastings, whose testimony cannot be lightly set aside, described the Hindus in general as "gentle, benevolent, more susceptible of gratitude for kindness shown them than promoted to vengeance for wrongs inflicted, and as exempt from the worst propensities of human passion as any people upon the face of the earth; they are faithful and affectionate in service, and submissive to legal authority . . . . The precepts of their religion are wonderfully fitted to promote the best ends of society, its peace and good order".[4] Even in the early quarter of the 19th century, the manners of people in territories removed from the Western influences were simple, courteous and unaffected. They were industrious and extremely kind to strangers, and

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 490. According to him, the Rajputs "so noble and distinct race of people" were not exceeded by any nation on earth in "a dignified material spirit." *Ibid.*

[2] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, Appendix xviii, pp. 438-39.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 439-40, *II*. [4] Mill: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 372, Note D.

their women folk were charming in their manners and irreproachable in their character. An Englishman touring in Punjab in the year 1809 was extremely pleased with the manners of the people. He wrote:

"It is very pleasing to travel through the towns and villages of this country. The inhabitants receive the strangers with an air of welcome that prepossesses them in their favour. They are, at the same time, courteous and respectful, contrary to what the traveller experiences in Mussulman towns where he is looked upon with contempt, and regarded as an unwelcome intruder."[1]

About the people of the Hindu State of Bishanpur in Bengal, before it passed under the British, we learn that they helped strangers with guides at free cost to conduct them from place to place. Robbery was a thing unheard of. In case of some loss of property, citizens held themselves responsible and made good the loss. People entertained no thoughts of injury to each other.[2]

In these respects, the huts and hamlets of rural India have been described as the abode of social virtues. The villagers were poor and wretched in so far as they were strangers to the delicacies and luxuries of life in the cities. Life in the towns was full of colour and contrasts but it lacked the brightness and intensity of life in the rural areas. According to Forbes, the Hindus, "who reside at a distance from capital cities, still preserve much of that simplicity of manners ascribed by the poets of the golden age· and seem, more than any other people now existing, to realize the innocent and peaceful modes of life, which ascribe to that happy era. When I saw the Brahman women of distinction drawing water at the village wells, and tending their cattle to the lakes and rivers, they recalled the transactions of the patriarchal days".[3] Life was full of confidence and mostly free from the vices of urban areas. The free movements of women of every strata, like the damsels of the heroic age, were in marked contrast to the restraints on them in the crowded cities. At their seminaries and temples, the village folk would assemble and have their

[1] Tour to Lahore—An Officer of Bengal Army, See *Asiatic Annual Register 1809*, Miscellaneous Tracts. p. 424.

[2] Raynal: *op. cit., I*, p. 475. [3] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, pp. 59-60.

innocent amusements of music and dancing in company. At their sacred groves and tanks they would beguile their leisure in simple sports, inspired with a high feeling of fellowship. Forbes informs us of the unsophisticated and unspoiled currents of life in the rural areas:

"I sometimes frequented places where the natives had never seen a European, and were ignorant of everything concerning us: there I beheld manners and customs simple as those were in the patriarchal age; these in the very style of Rebecca and the damsels of Mesopotamia, the Hindu villagers treated me with that artless hospitality so delightful in the poems of Homer, and other ancient records."[1]

The rural folk were all kindness, kindness even to the animals who were their constant companions of the fields. They impressed Bishop Heber in Northern India as a mild, pleasing and intelligent race, sober, parsimonious, industrious, and constitutionally kind-hearted.[2] They were specially very kind to the strangers, and in South India, Heyne writes that they would "furnish everything required, and dress all victuals wanted".[3] Robert Orme makes the following interesting observation on the Hindus:

"Nothing seems to have been wanting to the happiness of this nation, but that others should have looked on them with the same indifference with which they regarded the rest of the world."[4]

It is, however, emphasized in certain accounts that a deterioration in national character had set in, and more so in places where Indian society was coming in intimate contact with the Westerners. As early as the middle of the 18th century, Ives wrote about the coastal areas that trickery and cunning were creeping into the character of the Indian people. He writes:

"But for this we may think ourselves who first sullied their purity and debauched their manners They probably had never known the crime of cheating, had they not first learned it from the tricking Europeans."[5]

Innes Munro repeats the same sentiments about the close of the century that on the Coromandal coast the lower classes were

[1] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 143. [2] Mill: *op. cit., I*, p. 374.
[3] Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 291. See also Dow: *op. cit., I*, p. xxxvii.
[4] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 78. [5] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 48.

learning artifice and cunning from Europeans "in order to counteract the vicious practices of European emigrants".[1] In the first quarter of the 19th century, Elphinstone, the first Commissioner of the Deccan, observed that the character of the people in the northern territories of the East India Company was deteriorating on account of adulteration with many vices which were almost unknown to the people of Maharashtra.[2] Before the British rule, society was mostly governed on the basis of its local institutions, like the caste councils, the village community organization, and the courts of *Panchayet*. A relaxation in their jurisdiction resulted in corresponding laxity in public morals. The foreign courts scrapped their authority of punishment and deprived them of an effective means of exercising control over the morals of people.[3]

## *Sex-Life in Society*

Life in Indian society was also free from gross sexual abuses. Marriage was almost a universal institution and controlled licence. The heavy punishments of castes on "the most trivial lapses" were effective checks on the spread of licentious habits in society. Public opinion was especially severe on the conduct of women whose sexual frailties and aberrations even entailed life-long degeneration and excommunication.[4] In all communities, sexual weakness on the part of women was viewed as an unpardonable offence. The Parsees, too, we are told, punished adultery and fornication by death and the execution was performed secretly "either by lapidation, castigation, poisoning or drowning in the river.[5] The Hindu law forbade the capital

[1] Innes: *Operations on the Coromandel Coast*, p. 46.

[2] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 74. [3] According to Mr. Hanbury, secretary to the Madras Board of Revenue, "many evils flowed in every part of India" owing to the dimunition in the authority of the indigenous institutions. At the revenue consultations of May 22, 1818, he recorded a long minute in which he pointed out how under the British rule the vices of intoxication and immorality had increased as the caste councils were not empowered to inflict punishments on their members. See Sastri, *Munro System of British Statesmanship*, pp. 273-74.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 357-58. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 112, 481; *II*, 427, 746; *III*, p. 100, [5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 497.

punishment of women, and the British law private executions. Still, Buchanan informs us that near relations or husbands put to death those ladies who disgraced themselves by their licentious conduct. He even cites cases in which sons on attaining majority put to death their own mothers left as managers of large estates in young age on account of the death of their husbands, and who could not resist illegitimate connections with "paramours."[1] The European accounts generally speak of the Indian women as chaste and modest, trained from infancy into discreet conduct in society. Cases of abduction and elopement are rarely mentioned in them. In the year 1809 (March 20), when a case of seduction and elopement occurred in a Hindu family of lower caste in Calcutta, it created a wild sensation. The writer of the *Asiatic Annual Register* remarks that such cases, "though not uncommon in the brilliant and more enlightened society of Europe" were "rather of unusual occurrence in the dull, insipid routine of Asiatic life, where the fair sex are regarded with inferior consideration, and secluded from the intercourse of general society".[2] It is, however, true that society could not rigidly enforce its puritanic ideals and a certain corruption in sexual morals was inevitable. The ban on the marriage of widows in the upper strata, the legality of the system of concubinage, the institution of prostitution existing in all the towns and illicit sexual connections in the under-world were contributing their share to degeneration in sexual life.[3] Stavorinus even goes to the extent of suggesting that in the upper strata in Bengal, "prostitution is not thought a disgrace",[4] and that it was a gratification obtainable "for a trivial consideration".[5] In South India, the custom of *Devdasi*, the attachment of bands of dancing girls and priestesses to big temples, also encouraged libertinage. They were eagerly coaxed by government servants, who were mostly Brahmans. They generally had more than one wife, "very beautiful" too. Still they were keen on them. The Muslim officers are mentioned as spending a large part of their income over them.[6]

[1] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 476.
[2] *Asiatic Annual Register*, *1809*, *Bengal Occurrences*, p. 35, also p. 47.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 416-17, 446, 776, Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 316.
[4] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 409-10.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 438-39; *II*, pp. 248-49. [6] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 267,

They were also courted by chiefs and princes, who, according to Grose, "lavished uncommon sums".[1]

So far as the masses are concerned, such practices were not to their taste. Prostitutes and dancing girls were not looked upon with favour in society. They were not permitted to be outrageous in their conduct. Association with such ladies of ill-repute, familiarity with one of such women in public was damaging to reputation. Dubois observes in this connection:

> "The man who behaved familiarly with one of these women in public would be censored and despised by everybody who witnessed the scandal."[2]

Normally in Indian society, a man lost his caste by fornication if concubinage was not recognized by his caste. Buchanan says that no one was tolerated "to meddle with women of a rank higher than himself".[3] He also tells us that people complained to him that since the establishment of the British government "there is more laxity among the women than formerly, the husbands being afraid of making such severe examples, in cases of frailty, as were formerly usual; for with whatever was done the Nawab's government did not interfere".[4]

## *Sexual Life of the Aristocracy*

The contemporary accounts paint a very dark picture of the sexual life of the aristocracy. Placed in eminent positions they could easily challenge the rule of common law and gave free expression to their impulses. Buchanan cites the case of one Raja Mitrajit of Bihar, having a son from a Muslim woman yet suffered to continue in his caste. The Brahmans could not dare decree excommunication of anyone of his power and were "too complaisant to commit such an outrage".[5] In Central India, with the Rajput nobility, concubinage with female slaves had grown to monstrous extent. Malcolm says that the province of Malwa was "filled with the mixed progeny of these unfortunate women".[6] Many of the Rajput chiefs and landlords had "from fifty to two hundred female slaves in their family". They even permit-

[1] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 138.
[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 594.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 476.
[4] *Ibid.* *II*. p. 411.
[5] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 141.
[6] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 204.

ted them to have promiscuous sexual intercourse with outsiders and reaped a large profit from such a nefarious trade.[1] Elphinstone draws a sharp contrast between the sex-life of the higher and lower strata of society in Maharashtra. According to him, "adultery and prostitution are common in the upper classes; but in them alone".[2] The concubines are also mentioned a frailty of the business community. Pillai writes that when the concubines of Arna Chala Chetty and many others were put in prison at Pondicherry on account of the representations of the lower castes, the former felt "as though he had lost his head; never has such grief been seen".[3]

In the 18th century, the Muslim aristocracy of the ancient regime degenerated further to an incredible extent. Its life was a constant round of dissipation in slave girls and dancing girls. The decadent house of the Mughals passed under the domination of eunuchs and clowns. The descedants of Aurangzeb, revelled in their associations with people of low repute. Many of Shah Alum's advisers, particularly Isam-ul-Dowlah, "made up a point to procure pretty virgins and agreeable young women, which he got instructed in the accomplishments of dancing and singing".[4] The King had a large family of about 500 women and nearly 70 children, male and female.[5] Raynal writes that at Surat the Mughal nobility "carried every species of voluptuousness to excess", that young Abyssinian slaves were their favourite amusement. He reports on their daily routine as follows:

> "One part of the morning was employed in taking pains to arch their eye-brows, to settle their beards, and to paint the nails, and the inside of their hands."

The rest of the day was spent in smoking, perfuming, drinking, or in "reclining upon beds of roses" hearing stories, amidst musical amusements, the bands of dancers playing around. "The most corrupt of them used to throw themselves into the arms of some young Abyssinian slave", says he, "and employ-

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, pp. 202-05. [2] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 74.
[3] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *VII*, pp. 214-15.
[4] *Seir Mutaqherin*, IV, pp. 26-7.
[5] Gupta: *Account of Louis Polier, Shah Alum II*, pp. 69-70.

ed every artifice practised in these regions, to heighten the most infamous of all passions".[1]

Our contemporary Muslim historian writes with indignation about the corruption of the gubernatorial clique at Murshidabad—with the singular exception of Alivardi Khan. The "vestiges of modesty" were only confined to "some poor and virtuous people". According to him, Murshidabad down to the days of Raza Khan wore the appearance of "one of loth's towns", and corruption was widespread in the upper strata.[2] The Nawabs of Bengal from Sarfaraz Khan down to Mir Jafar had no reputation for character. Scrafton speaks of their extreme sensuality and "detestable character".[3] According to Stavorinus, "lascivious intemperance and every kind of unbridled lewdness" were recklessly indulged in by Indians and Europeans alike in the lower parts of Bengal.[4] The bazaar gossips delighted in painting the old infirm Nizam as a debauch using all artifices "pulverized gold mixed with his foods" to stimulate his failing nerves.[5] The harems of the Mughal nobility are mentioned as large colonies of handsomest women of Asia. Those of Kashmir were especially favoured for their delicacy and beauty. Among the female attendants, the "Habshi" female slaves were preferred for their fidelity.[6] About 1794, Twining of the Bengal Civil Service, travelling from Shikohabad towards Agra, met a detachment of cavalry escorting "a convoy of Cashmerian beauties to the royal seraglio of Lucknow". The ladies and their female attendants were all carried in covered

[1] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 36-8.
[2] *Seir Mutaqherin*. *III*, pp. 84-5.
[3] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 23-5.
[4] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 456-57. He cites the case of a Muslim lady, who through "the grossest lust" abandoned herself to an unnatural sexual intercourse resulting in her death.
[5] Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 271.
[6] Grose, *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 135-36. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp, 42-3. It is interesting to study the following figures about the Zenanas of the Nawabs:
Nizam of Hyderabad—More than "600 beauties", Heyne, *op. cit.*, p. 271
Asaf-ud-Daula of Oudh—About 500 "of the greatest beauties of India." Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 298.
The author of *Seir Mutaqherin* condemns Asaf-ud-Daula for his unnatural tastes and passions, *IV*, pp. 97-8.

palanquins.[1] The author of *Qanoon-i-Islam* throws further light on the degenerate tastes of the Indian aristocracy of the period.[2] It is difficult to disagree with Forbes that to the "superior classes of Asiatics" "sensual pleasures" were the *Summum Bonum* of life. Even in their old age their minds "untaught by learning and experience, untutored by science and literature" had no relish for "those calm delights which soften the declining paths of the pious Christian, and gild the rays of the setting sun".[3] According to him, the "Orientals" in highlife were "generally men of debauched morals and vitiated taste, who have no idea of the pure and tender passion of love:

*Nough do they know of these sweet graceful arts,*
*Those thousand decencies that daily flow*
*From female words and actions: mixt with love,*
*And sweet compliance.*[4]

From these accounts it is plain that the indecencies in sex-life were mostly confined to the feudal aristocracy in Indian society.

## *Social Intercourse and Etiquette*

A prominent feature of life in Indian society was its articulate and highly developed technique of social intercourse. It was regulated by various rules and conventions which people of the upper strata very much prized. To the foreigners, the formalities of social intercourse which European society also borrowed from India appeared quite innocuous. We have the following confession of an English damsel, cast in the whirligig of intense life at Calcutta in the early part of the 19th century:

"The last agreeable part of Indian life appears to me to lie in the eternal rounds of etiquette and never-ending formalities, to which I am told all social comfort is compelled to give way; at least in the Presidency."[5]

The French missionary was astonished at the sensitiveness of society to its code of etiquette and admits "that the laws of etiquette and social politeness are much more clearly laid down, and much better observed by all classes of Hindus, than they are by people of corresponding social position in Europe."[6]

[1] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 186.
[2] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, p. 17.
[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 130.
[4] *Ibid.*, *II*, pp. 282-83.
[5] Bacon: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 131-32
[6] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 334.

Robert Orme, commending the superior manners of the Muslim gentry, writes:

> "By the experience which they have had of Europeans, they deny us all pretensions to politeness. Our familiarities appear shocking to their notions of solemnity."[1]

## *Social Rules of Etiquette*

In Indian society, the rules of etiquette, of courtesy, of politeness, civility and polish in behaviour were very well understood. From a gentleman of the 18th century, people expected great restraint in, and control over, behaviour, sobriety in speech, and equanimity of mind in strange surroundings. A military officer of the Company who travelled in the Nizam's territories in 1791 was surprised at "the decorum, gravity, and elegance" of Muslim children of good families, who could "assume the unaffected steadiness of an old courtier" on ceremonious occasions. According to him, the children of the higher classes were trained into good manners and leading principles of external behaviour from their very childhood. These principles were understood to be as "majestic and martial deportment, a serene and steady countenance, which should remain calm and unaffected amidst the greatest events; neither manifesting signs of depression nor exaltation, but capable of that pliability which softens the countenance to the reception of friends and accompanies good offices with a benignant smile."[2] About the Mughal nobility on the Western Coast, Surat, etc., Grose writes that they were, "from their childhood, tutored and trained with great gravity and circumspection in public, or specially to curb any passion from breaking out into outward emotions of heat or anger."[3] Scrafton also informs us that in the aristocratic families it was the usual practice to train children in good manners. He writes:

> "At this early age (of five or six years), they are brought into company, where they are taught to behave with great gravity and circumspection, to curb every motion of impatience, learn all the punctilious ceremonies of eastern courts, to say their prayer in public and every devotion of exterior

[1] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 426.
[2] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 76. [3] Grose: *op. cit., I*, p. 147.

and it is astonishing to see how well a boy of eight or nine years will acquit himself in company."[1]

The sons of Tipu, particularly Mirza, the younger only about eight years of age, sent as hostages to the government of Cornwallis, have been highly praised for their perfect behaviour, their pleasing and polite manners by Twining who met them.[2] Forster describes Shujauddaula of Oudh as "courteous and affable" gifted with "sinuating address, and accomplished manners" and "soothing flow of language".[3] In the higher Muslim society, good manners were undoubtedly considered part and parcel of good breeding and noble bearing.

Dignified and graceful manners, polite and courteous behaviour were equally valued in the Hindu society. Craufurd observes that the Hindus were "great observers of decorum" and that their manners were unaffected. They possessed much "natural politeness" and showed "extraordinary degree of caution" in avoiding offence to others either by speech or conduct.[4] Twining, who made a tour of Northern India in the last decade of the 18th century and visited all the important towns on the Ganga and Jumna, highly speaks of the general behaviour of people in the streets and markets. He was also very much impressed by the behaviour of the lower classes. His remarks deserve to be cited:

> "The vulgar awkwardness which characterizes the lower classes of some European nations... is not to be found in India. The remark is applicable to the interior of the provinces as to the cities and towns. A clownish countryman or gaping embarrassed youth is never seen. The grace, promptitude, and intelligence with which a village lad of ten years answers a question which a stranger stops to put to him must surprise every Englishman. On numberless occasions has it happened to me to make this observation, when mixing with the population of an extensive district under my charge."[5]

Hodges who travelled into the interior regions of Southern India was struck with the great attention people showed to

[1] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21. [2] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 66.
[3] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 184.
[4] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 316.
[5] Twining: *op. cit.* p. 252, footnote. also pp. 51-2, 241-42.

strangers and observes that it was a universal trait of their character not to interrupt any person while he was speaking "but wait patiently till he has concluded; then answer with the most perfect respect and composure". People were "extremely careful not to interrupt one another in discourse".[1] According to him, a Muslim gentleman was "a perfect model of a well-bred man". Of the people at Varanasi, he writes that their manners were "more than three thousand years old" and their "attention and polished behaviour" was an indication of "the most highly civilized state of society".[2] European accounts emphasize that there was an established etiquette in society to suit different occasions. Even in normal day-to-day social intercourse people showed "due attentions" to others according to their ranks and behaved with great dignity and propriety.[3] To speak anything insulting and to use abusive language were considered marks of low birth. Treading on anyone's foot even by accident was a matter for "immediate apology". A blow on the head knocking off turban, striking another with shoes or sandals, even mere threats of such conduct were considered sufficient to provoke a criminal prosecution.[4] When people of lower castes, spoke to those of the higher, they observed proper distance and used proper speech and expressions implying deference. The seniority and rank of people was highly respected.[5] Likewise people of superior rank and castes are mentioned as adopting postures which signified their status. On the roads, people of humble birth and status would often retire to one side in deference to the "big guns" moving in carriages, palanquins or on horses.[6] A woman facing a man directly with face or head uncovered was considered to be immodest and outside the house she was to avoid gaping at strangers. She was to bow reverentially before those known to her and superior in relationship.[7]

[1] Hodges: *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4. also Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 77.

[2] Hodges: *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

[3] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 77.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 332.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 191. [6] *Ibid.*, p. 333.

[7] *Ibid.*, Dubois says: "It is a mark of respect when women turn their backs on men whom they hold in high esteem. At any rate, they must turn away their faces or cover them with their saries."

The social etiquette of the 18th century was highly conventional and paid utmost consideration to superiority of rank and relationship. At the meetings of the courts seating arrangements were made according to the different ranks of the nobility, and perfect discipline and austerity characterized its proceedings throughout. Robert Orme states that among equals an "uncivil thing" was never said, and that on superiors "the most extravagant adulation, both of gesture and words", was lavished. He reports:

> "Persons of distinction have been known, through a sense of shame, to make away with themselves, after having committed an involuntary decorum in the presence of the superior."

According to him, in India, social etiquette based on articulate class consciousness was carried "to a more refined pitch than in any other part of the world, excepting China". It was a fundamental part of people's culture and education "as without them a man, instead of making his fortune, be liable to lose his head".[1] The European residents found it rather difficult to conform to the high standards of social etiquette in India. Robert Orme cites an interesting case about one of the Court's meetings in Bengal in which the Europeans were honoured with seats near the Nawab. They however disgraced themselves by their ridiculous behaviour. By accident, a noble, on bowing in respect to the Nawab, fell back in the cistern of the fountain, and they "burst into repeated peals of laughter, and flung themselves into all the attitudes which usually accompany the excess of it". The rest of the assembly was austere: "Not a muscle was changed in the countenance of any other person in the assembly .... The unlucky man went out with great composure to change his raimant; and all the attention of the company was diverted from him to the boisterous mirth of the strangers, which became a real matter of astonishment to these nice observers of decorum."[2] In Indian society, violation of the rules of etiquette was not tolerated in any sphere of life. Pillai tells us that in the commercial circles the different rules of courtesy were carefully observed.[3] The modes of salutations, and the various rules of courtesy regulating the reception of friends, visitors, etc., testify to this fact.

[1] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 426-28. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 427.
[3] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 26.

## *The Modes of Salutations and Greetings*

The modes of salutations varied according to the degrees of intimacy and differences of rank.[1] Dubois gives a lengthy account of those current in the Hindu society. In some provinces people greeted each other by putting their right hand on their heart, in others they simply stretched it. It was not customary to accost a strange person "unless he be of a very high rank". The *Charan-sparsha*, or touching the feet generally three times, was a popular mode of reverential salutation.[2] The Muslim salutation, *Salaam*, was also popular with the Hindus and it consisted "in touching the forehead with the right hand, and bowing at the same time, with more or less emphasis, according to the rank of the person they are greeting". Whenever a person of very high rank was to be greeted, this obeisance was frequently performed by touching the ground with both hands, and then raising them to the foreheads.[3] The *Salaam* appears to have been a common salutation with all classes everywhere. About Bengal, Stavorinus writes that this was the usual mode of salutation. If the people wished to make "a very humble *Salam*, or obeisance, they first lay their right hand upon the breast, then touch the ground with it, and afterwards the forehead".[4] In the Muslim society, amongst equals *Salaam Bundugee*, *Tusslemat* were the usual expressions of greeting, and *Qudumbosse* or kissing the feet was a popular mode of greeting high-class people and elderly relations.[5] There were many other modes of greetings which reveal the extent to which rank and age were honoured in society. They also reveal the punctilious regard of people to the outward forms of civilities and decorum. Ali has vividly described the grace and dignity with which the ladies of the Muslim gentry received their superiors:

> "I should say they rarely stand; but when distinguished guests, or their elders amongst relatives are announced, this mark of respect is never omitted. It is an interesting sight, as they have much ease and grace in their manner, which no tutoring can impart; they rise and arrange their drapery,

[1] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 54. [2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 329.
[3] *Ibid.* [4] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 454.
[5] *Qanoon-i-Islam*, p. 116.

advance a few steps from their place in the hall, and embrace the visitor thrice in due form, ending by salaaming, with the head bowed very low towards the ground and the open hand raised to the forehead, three times in succession with solemnity and diginity."[1]

Dubois writes that in South India, *Namaskar*, joining both the palms, touching the forehead, and then pulling them above the head, accompanied by words *Sarnama, Ayya,* "respectful greeting" was a salutation to a superior who acknowledged it by extending his "right hand, partially open" and uttered *Asirvadam*—God bless you. He says that the religious *Gurus* and Brahmans alone were entitled to confer these blessings.[2] Whenever an extraordinary mark of respect was to be shown, *Shastanga Pranam*—a salutation expressing humility—was practised. He incorrectly interprets it as "prostration of the six members" or *Angas* instead of eight, the two hands, the two feet, the two knees, forehead and breast. His description of it is as follows:

"The person who performs it lies prostrate, his face on the ground and his arms extended beyond his head . . . . When it is performed, the feet, the knees, the stomach, the chest, the forehead, and the arms must touch the earth. It is thus that prostrations are made before persons of high degree, such as princes and priests. Children sometimes prostrate themselves before their fathers. It is by no means rare to see Sudras of different classes performing Shastanga before Brahmans; and it often happens that princes, before engaging an enemy, thus prostrate themselves before the armies drawn up battle array."[3]

Touching the feet was a common mode of greeting "between a son and a father, or between a younger and an elder brother, on meeting after a long separation. The same humble attitude is adopted when asking for pardon or for a favour[4]. Women bowed respectfully to men. Children saluted their elders standing upright "with their arms crossed on their chest". Whenever relatives or intimate friends met after a long separation, they clasped each other "in their arms, and take hold of each other's

[1] Ali: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 109-10.
[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 329-30.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 330, also p. 42.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 330.

chin, shedding tears of joy".[1] Such an embrace was the highest expression of intimacy of feeling. Embrace in public was, however, not permissible between people of opposite sexes and was solely confined to persons of the same sex, rank and status. The pressing of hand and other mild expressions of intimacy were current at the time of meeting and parting. Kissing in public was considerd as "the grossest breach of decorum". Such liberty a brother would not take with his sister, a son with his mother. The European salutation in which the lips would touch the face was not allowed by society to the same sex.[2]

## *Social Etiquette*

Elaborate rules of conduct regulated social meetings. In the aristocratic circles, these meetings were a highly ceremonious affair. The exchange of costly gifts and presents was a well-established custom signifying intimacy of feeling. We have an authentic eye-witness description of the social visits to each other among the Rajput and Maratha princes:

> "Upon such occasions, the most superb equipage of state is marshalled forth; elephants richly adorned, led horses, running camels, and always a select body of cavalry, attend the procession . . . the cavalry firing off their pieces, and frequently performing tournaments with the bollah or spear . . . . "

Names of distinguished persons were proclaimed aloud with titles. Valuable *Khilats* were distributed to the camp followers, diamonds and pearls were exchanged on parting. A simple ceremony of embrace and salutation and the distribution of betels closed the entire show.[3]

According to Ives, on formal visits to eminent persons "it is usual to bring presents of the richest and most valuable things of the country".[4] Dubois corroborates it by stating that it was considered a serious breach of good manners if a man appeared "with empty hands before anyone of superior position, or from whom a favour is expected". On visiting a man for the first time one was not to omit taking presents, which showed that

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 330-31. [2] *Ibid.*, also Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 72.
[3] *Asiatic Annual Register, 1799*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 146.
[4] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 75.

he was respectful and had friendly intentions.[1] From Pillai we note that the host was also to observe certain courtesies—such as giving presents to his guests on departure if they were of equal or superior status. Garlanding of guests, annointing their necks, arms, foreheads, etc., with sandal, and serving them with betels were equally important.[2] When Europeans met the Indian grandies, they brought with them presents according to the Indian custom, and on departure, they too did not return empty handed.[3] The sprinkling of rose-water, so popular at private social gatherings of the gentry, appears to have been a hilarious modification of the Timurid ceremony of *Gulabpashi*, mentioned by Jehangir in connection with his court festivals.[4] Here is an interesting account of the meeting of Admiral Watson and other English officers with the Nabab of Arcot:

> "The Nawab, upon this occasion, ordered rich perfume of what is called the Otta of roses to be brought to him, a few drops of which he put into his hand, and having himself opened the bosom of Watson's shirt, he rubbed the same over the admiral's breast. This was intended as the highest honour he could confer upon. He afterwards did the same to Admiral Pocock; and his' Bakshi or treasurer, performed the like ceremony on all the other officers . . . . Betel-nut and chunam were then most plentifully distributed, and showers of rose-water fell upon all."[5]

The meeting dispersed after a hearty embrace between the host and the guest.

The Europeans in India, too, practised these courtesies, gave betels to their Indian guests and sprinkled rose-water on them.[6] Among equals exchange of turbans was symbolic of close relationship and brotherly affection. For this reason, says Pillai, among the various presents made by Muhammad Ali Khan to Dupleix on one occasion, the latter selected the turban.[7]

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 334.
[2] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 233-34, 265-66, 281; *II*, pp. 115-16; *IV*, pp. 112.
[3] *Ibid.*, *III*, pp. 328-32, 340-43; *IV*, pp. 301-02, 360-61.
[4] *Memoirs of Jehangir*: *I*, p. 265. [5] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 72.
[6] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 171. [7] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 340.
Exchange of complimentary gifts was also an important feature of social intercourse among the different governments. About the end of 1788, after

(*Continued*)

The social rules of etiquette were well understood among all classes, and marked the Indian people distinctly as a highly cultivated nation. Dubois writes how elaborate were the rules laid down for the reception of guests at one's house. The visitor was always allowed to walk first and no host would be audacious to turn his back upon a guest. The guest, on his part, "not to appear wanting in politeness, walks sideways until both have passed the threshold". Likewise, a servant would, in token of his humility, not try to walk in front of his master.[1] In the presence of people of superior rank, uncivil things were never to be mentioned. Pillai has unhesitatingly expressed the guiding principle of his behaviour towards his master Dupleix:

> "It is not seemly to contradict him, and besides, that would require much explanation. If he asked me whether the brinjal would grow among rocks, I should reply that I had seen them in thousands of clusters and on creepers."[2]

He was not to differ at all from his master's views, though we know that the brinjals will not grow among rocks, nor would they grow in clusters.

In Indian society, compliments and congratulations, too, were a subtle and perfect art. This was natural in a society dominated by a strong feudal nobility. In this connection, Europeans have referred to certain precautions. It was disrespectful to tell a man bluntly that he was very happy, lucky, healthy, blessed with lovely children. Such straight and honest remarks were liable to be misconstrued for malice or envy. Dubois mentions an interesting

the first Maratha war, the British Government was eager to resume social and political contacts with the Poona Government. It sent through its Resident C.W. Malet a bale of the finest fabrics of Bengal as a complimentary gift. In the Christma of the year 1783, Malet also sent to the Poona court fruits and sweetmeats as presents. The Maratha court reciprocated the civility of the British Government with the present of "a diamond ring and a string of pearls". On June 19 and 22, 1789, the Maratha court honoured Lord Cornwallis with presents of several articles of Deccan fabrics "to convey their sense of regard and respect for the British Government".

*Proceedings*, The Indian Historical Records Commission XI, December 1928, pp. 178-79.

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 332-33.

[2] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *V*, p. 201.

case. He happened to congratulate some fishermen on their good luck in catching fish every time "the nets were let down". But his civility had a most unlooked for result, for these worthy people gathered up their nets and their fish without a word, and looking at me very indignantly, promptly went off, grumbling to each other under their breath: "What have we done to this Firinghi guru that he comes here and is so jealous of us".[1] Mon. Lass, the French Chief at Cossimbazar in the time of Sirajuddaula, also informs us that:

> "In India it is thought disrespectful to tell a great man clearly the evil which is said of him. If anyone knows that designs are formed against his life, the subject or inferior must use circumlocutions, suggest the subject in vague terms, and speak in enigmas."[2]

In Indian society, it was most customary for people to visit each other on occasions of social or religious ceremonies and festivals. On such occasions, gifts were "conveyed with much solemnity and accompanied by instruments of music".[3] A great deal of social intercourse amongst people was encouraged by various other considerations. When Pillai was elevated to the position of Chief Dubash at Pondicherry, he writes, a great scholar of Trichinopoly composed an ode in his honour in Telugu. It was set to music, dancing women were taught to sing it, and a grand performance was arranged in his honour at a garden house.[4] When he transferred his merchandise to a different house, he performed "the ceremony of occupying the house for the first time", gave betels and nuts to his guests.[5] At Joseph's feast, Dupleix's name day, the Company's merchants at Pondicherry visited him "with a gold chain weighing fifty pagodas and two pieces of percullars". The Governor honoured them with betel and sprinkled rose-water and received their compliments.[6] From these accounts, we can infer that there was no dearth of intimate social contacts among people and courtesy visits and calls were not rare. We learn, for example, that paying visits to each other at the time of condolence was absolutely imperative and failure to abide by the

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 331. Hill: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 190, footnote.
[2] Dubois: pp. 333-34. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p, 128. Pillai: *op. cit.*, *IV*, p. 21.
[4] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 238. [5] *Ibid.*, *III*, p. 119. [6] *Ibid.*, *IV*, p. 21.

convention could not be forgiven or forgotten.[1] Judged from its rules of social intercourse and etiquette, the Indian society could lay every claim to high culture and civilization.

## *Some Outstanding Abuses*

It is difficult to wade through contemporary European literature, without being held up by frequent references to certain outstanding abuses in Indian society, like *Sati*, female infanticide, slavery, etc. They appear rooted in the structure of society and were supported on the basis of custom and tradition. A proper appreciation of these is necessary as the accounts of some of the British writers are very much misleading.

*Sati:* From Alexander's invasion down to our times this custom has been referred to by foreigners.[2] In Indian society, the life of the widow in the upper strata of the Hindu community was "too sordid for contemplation" and the lady "who mounted the pyre passed from the condition of a sinner to one of beatification". It is, however, rash to assert that "everything conspired to point the widow along one path, that which led to the red glow of the funeral pyre".[3] The statements of Rev. Ward and later British observers that incredible numbers of victims annually perished in the "Aceldame" are sheer propaganda.[4] From a critical study of the contemporary European accounts, it is evident that at no time was the country as a whole engulfed in this practice. We do not find it in Malabar where the matriarchal family was in vogue with the military population. In South India, Dubois clearly states that the practice was very rare: "The Suttees are seldom seen."[5] The

[1] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 4. Dubois: *Hindu Manners*, p. 334.

[2] Thomson: *Suttee*, p. 16.
V. Smith attributes Scythian origin to the practice. But according to Edward, Sati and Thrasian funeral rites bear near resemblance. He is of opinion that this rite glorified the warrior caste and their princes in particular and that it was prevalent in the Dravidian society along with other customs like the human sacrifices. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21, 22-24.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

[4] Ward: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. xcv. According to him their number annually was not less than 10,500.

[5] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 362, footnote.

Brahmans never practised it and widows with "shorn heads" abounded in their castes. No blame or discredit was attached to the wife who was not eager to join her husband in the invisible world.[1] The social deification of the rite, the monuments of *Satis* enshrining their sacrifices seen by foreigners at different places in the country point to the rarity rather than popularity of the practice.[2] Dubois lived in the southern parts of the country for about thirty years and he cites only two instances of the rite. The one was in the Hindu royal family of Tanjore in 1804, and the other in a village when the widow of a wealthy *Vaisya* performed it. At the latter occasion, an immense concourse of people gathered to witness the ceremony and sought her blessings.[3] Buchanan, who visited the Company's southern territories in the first decade of the 19th century, reports that the custom had become obsolete and that among the Brahmans it had never existed.[4] According to him, it was in some low castes only and some places that formerly women were reported to be burying themselves alive with their deceased husbands.[5] About 1780 Alexander Dow definitely states that the rite was not reckoned a religious duty and had "for the most part fallen into disuetude in India.[6] About the middle of the 18th century, Scrafton wrote even for Bengal that the practice was "far from common" and was only complied with by those of "illustrious families".[7] About the south-western parts of the Peninsula, both Forbes and Stavorinus testify to the rarity of the practice.[8] The former writer was astonished to learn that while in the rest of India, the practice was seldom met with, it flourished in the British territories of Bengal.[9] There is no doubt that the custom, as Craufurd says, continued to exist but it was never common.[10]

The rite of *Sati* flourished to a negligible extent, mostly as

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 359-60.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 361-62. Malcolm: *Memoir, II*, pp. 206-07. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 277. [3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 365-70.
[4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 349, 419; *III*, p. 95.
[5] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 242; *II*, p. 330. [6] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. xxxv.
[7] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 11.
[8] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 484. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 373.
[9] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 373.
[10] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 259-60. Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 364, footnote.

a social convention in the Hindu ruling houses. It is generally mentioned in connection with the Rajput ladies of "the blue blood". In Central India, says Malcolm, it was common "when the Rajput had power and influence", but under the Marathas it was very rare. It was mostly performed in the ruling houses of Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur. In Malwa it was almost unknown.[1] In many Rajput ruling families, Malcolm adds, there was not a single case of *Sati* for three generations. The bards used to sing hymns in praise of the heroines of the past "who had acquired immortality by perishing in the flames which consumed the bodies of their lords".[2] In the year 1809, an Englishman visiting Punjab reported that the practice of *Sati* did not prevail in that part of the country, but that it was common with the ladies of the Rajput nobility at Jammu. He even goes to the extent of asserting that it was often enforced as a measure of compulsion.[3] His opinion in support of compulsion is not to be credited as it is based on hearsay evidence. It certainly adds strength to the argument that the rite of *Sati* was understood as a privilege of the ladies of the Rajput castes.

In the later 18th century, we however find that the custom was spreading to other groups. In Central India, the women of Brahmans and Bhats, and in the Maratha territories, the ladies of the Maratha chiefs were not denied the privilege of martyrdom through such voluntary immolations. Forbes mentions a few cases among the Maratha chiefs. The wife of Madho Rao, "a woman of beauty and virtue", followed her husband on the pyre with admirable dignity and fortitude. With her own hand she set fire to the sandal pile, "fed with clarified butter and aromatic oils and then as cended it to consume her mortal coil."[4] Sir John Malcolm cites the case of the daughter of Ahilya Bai who became a widow at an early age. She burnt herself with the corpse of her husband although she had a child. The child, as was to be expected, died soon after.[5] Holwell cites the case of the widow of one Ram Chandra Pandit "of the Mahratha tribe",

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 206-07. He says that at some places, mothers burnt themselves on the death of their only son. *Ibid.*, p. 206, footnote.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 207-08.

[3] *Asiatic Annual Register for 1809*, Miscellaneous Tracts, pp. 422-23, 425.

[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 299. [5] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 190-92.

aged about seventeen or eighteen, who burnt herself on the 4th Ferbruary, 1742, at Cossimbazar. In vain, she was persuaded by Lady Russel not to perform the ceremony as she had two girls and a boy to be cared for.[1] In his letter of June 3, 1787, to Cornwallis, C.W. Malet wrote from Poona about two Maratha women aged 20 and 30, respectively, performing the ceremony of burning themselves alive when they heard the news of the death of their husbands, who died of some epidemic in the army. They threw themselves headlong into pits about 14 feet deep after completing all the necessary ceremonies. These pits were filled with inflammable materials producing fierce fire of embers. He also wrote that the Brahman women, too, burnt themselves on the funeral pile of their husbands.[2] In Bengal, we come across certain cases when low-caste women buried themselves with their dead husbands. It was of course not practised among the high castes.[3]

There is no dearth of evidence to show that the women who performed such rites, too horrid and shocking to contemplate, gloried in their fate. Religion shed a lustre on their example. They were deified. Vows and prayers continued to be addressed to them. Their intercession was sought in sickness and adversity.[4] The author of *Araish-i-Mahfil* tells us that the Hindu wife, who could not "bear the flame of the fire of parting" from her husband, mounted the pyre gladly. The belief of enjoying union with the husband in the next world sustained her in her fatal resolution.[5] Craufurd, however, says that a pregnant woman was not allowed to perform the rite. When the husband died at a distance, she could not perform it "unless she can procure his girdle or turban to be placed on the funeral pyre".[6] In his letter of 1st October, 1779, on India, Macintosh,

[1] Holwell: *Interesting Historical Events*, *II*, p. 93.

[2] *Selections, Calcutta Gazette*, *II*, pp. 111-12.

[3] *Ibid.*, Letter of 29th July, 1790, pp. 270-71, see also Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 441, 451.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 361-62. Campbell: *Journey Overland to India*, pp. 138-42. Coleman: *op. cit.*, pp. 166-74. Holwell incorrectly states that the Brahmans took "unwearied pains to encourage, promote, and confirm in the minds of the Gentoo wives, this spirit of burning." Holwell: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 89.

[5] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 46.

[6] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 259-60.

a Bengal civilian officer, analyses the working of complex motives which prompted the Hindu widow of high status to perform the rite. According to him, merely frantic love, courage and ambition were not strong enough, and that the Brahman priests also did not encourage it. The torture of widowed life, aggrandisement of the reputation of the family and thirst for immortality worked as strong influences in favour of *Sati*. He, however, states that she was persuaded by her relations and others not to undertake the rite but once she had resolved, she could not change her mind or else she was to lose her caste. Grace marked her conduct on all such occasions.[1] He observes:

> "It is to the honour of that sex and these climes that the greatest courage they exhibit is the effect not of the furious impulses of rage and revenge, but conscious dignity and love."[2]

Forbes admires the heroism of the Hindu widow but pities her, as she was "biassed by wrong education, and influenced by a wrong conduct".[3] Craufurd pays her the following tribute:

> "Such is the influence of customs and the sense of shame that a woman of the highest birth will undergo this awful sacrifice with as much fortitude and composure as ever were exhibited by any hero or philosopher of antiquity."[4]

Stavorinus cites the case of the widow of a Bengali broker who was a debauch and who had constantly neglected her. Her relations and friends persuaded her not to perform the rite as she was ill-treated by her husband all his life. But she gladly passed through the ordeal.[5]

The lady who was going to perform this ceremony was not allowed to be defiled by the touch of a non-Hindu. The Dutch Director, Sichterman, in 1744 imprudently touched such a lady in Bengal and "was obliged to pay twenty-five thousand rupees".[6] Craufurd states that two British officers serving in the Nawab of Arcot's army in the province of Tanjore gallantly rescued a woman from the pile by drawing their swords. The woman was later restored to her relations but the Brahman priests would

[1] *Selections, Calcutta Gazette, V*, pp. 653-54.
[2] *Ibid.* [3] Forbes: *op. cit., II*, p. 322. [4] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 261.
[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit., I*, pp. 448-49. [6] *Ibid.*

not permit her to commit the rite as she was polluted and had lost the virtues of her caste.[1]

Most of the eye-witness accounts of the period on *Sati* relate to Bengal, particulary the lower part of it. The tragic austerity of the ceremony was in sharp contrast to the wild beat of drums and other musical instruments on the occasion. People gathered in hundreds and witnessed the ceremony with "extraordinary levity and consciousness". The custom demonstrates the evil impact of a misunderstood religion in society.[2] It is, however, gratifying to learn that till the end of the century, even in Bengal no social pressure was exercised on women to perform this awful sacrifice.[3] But the first three decades of the 19th century saw a gradual rise in the number of victims. The reports of the District Magistrates continue to refer to them throughout the first half of the century.[4] There are cases in which "a score or even two score women" were burnt "with one quite unimportant man". We even learn of a pyre which continued burning for three days at Calcutta "while relays of widows were fetched from a distance". The year 1815 saw 378 cases reported from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. In 1817 the number rose to 706. In 1819 the cases reported for Calcutta alone amounted to 421. The consensus of opinion in European circles was that society used force to sacrifice widows in this manner. Raja Ram Mohun Roy, shocked at the sight of his brother's wife being burnt, held this view.[5] To this day, this chronic social deterioration in Bengal has baffled precise explanation. Bengal lay under the curse of "kulinism" and her economic life had been completely shattered under foreign rule. The ease with which the Company's Government connived at the custom was also responsible for cheap, callous disposal of female life under the cover of a false religious ideal.

In Indian society the custom of female infanticide was not a universal practice with any caste or tribe. But the accounts of the civil servants of East India Company suggest that it was in

[1] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 274.

[2] See Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 443-44. Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 463-67.

[3] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 277. Bolts: *op. cit.*, p. 7. Hodges: *op. cit.*, pp. 79-82. Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 556.

[4] Peggs: *India's Cries to British Humanity.*

[5] Thompson: *op. cit.*, pp. 30-7. Beveridge: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 189.

existence. Lord Teignmouth admits that this practice was not so general "as to become a custom with any sect or race of people" but there was no doubt that it was practised. About 1788-89 the Company's government learnt that female infants were done to death by starvation by mothers amongst Rajkumars—a Rajput caste at Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh. The Resident pointed out that the expenses of marriage, difficulties in arranging suitable matches for their daughters were the main reasons. Among these people "instances where more than one daughter had been spared were very rare," and there was only one village which was an exception to it.[1] A European gentleman in his letter to the *Asiatic Annual Register* in the year 1803 mentions female infanticide as quite popular with these Rajkumars.[2] About the district of Gorakhpur, Buchanan writes that before the establishment of the British power, the Rajputs put to death their girls on birth "as a matter of course" and no one had a right to interfere. He further informs us that they continued to do so secretly in the British territories announcing disease as the cause of death or sent their wives to the territories of the Nawab of Oudh at the time of delivery. The Sirnets, Bisens, and other Rajput castes which did not practise it were put to great difficulty in arranging suitable match for the marriage of their daughters. Their daughters were often married to persons of poor means.[3] Other accounts available for the period also mark the Rajputs as the only sinners in this respect at other places. In Central India, Malcolm writes that the practice was in existence in the upper Rajput strata for reasons of family pride—a mania which was not shared by the lower strata. An inferior match was considered disgraceful to the reputation of the family.[4] Below the Vindhya range, in the areas now constituting Madhya Pradesh, we find that the custom was prevalent among some Rajput castes. This had "its source in fastidious pride, which cannot brook appellations absurdly deemed contumacious", that to the proud Rajput, the marriage of his daughter was a humiliating circumstance.[5]

The British Administrators of the early 19th century observed

[1] *Asiatic Researches, IV*, pp. 353-54.
[2] *Asiatic Annual Register for the Year 1803, Letters*, pp. 26-7.
[3] Martin: *op. cit., II*, p. 464. [4] Malcolm: *op. cit., II*, pp. 208-09.
[5] *Asiatic Annual Register for the Year 1806*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 7.

that female infanticide was also prevalent among the Rajputs in Cutch and Kathiawar. By the year 1807, Major Walker succeeded in securing solemn engagemens with the chiefs of Gondal, Jamnagar and others of "Jahrejah tribe" renouncing the evil practice.[1] J. P. Willoughby, after his appointment as Political Agent in Kathiawar, severely dealt with the Jharigah chiefs in many cases and the dread of punishment led to considerable dimunition in this atrocious practice.[2] In the whole Jharigah population of Kathiawar exceeding more than eight thousand, not more than sixty-three female children were found preserved in the course of ten years. Major Walker was told by the chiefs: "Pay our daughters' marriage portions and they shall live."[3] He states an interesting story about the origin of the practice with Jharigahs which shows that the difficulties involved in the marriages of daughters were fundamentally responsible for this vicious practice.[4]

There is no doubt that female infanticide prevailed among the Rajputs "who plume themselves on their chivalrous spirit, and are admitted on all hands to furnish the finest specimens of the Hindoo race". The pride of clan and the poverty of means encourage it in some of the sub-castes of their community.[5]

*Slavery*: In the 18th century, the sale and purchase of slaves was a well-established social usage, and there is positive evidence to suggest that the Indian Governments permitted it. Hamilton who visited India at the beginning of the 18th century says that at Thatta, in Sindh, he was empowered to dispose of the families of the debtors by sale without the mediation of the courts.[6] Under the Peshwas, the government approved of the sale of women even of respectable families as slaves on charges of adultery. Traffic in slavery was quite hot in the territories under the Poona government and there was no punitive legislation against it. There are many cases on record which show that the government even realized some revenue from such a nefarious deal.[7] About Central India, Malcolm writes that the masters were

[1] Moor: *Hindu Infanticide*, pp. 40-103. [2] Beveridge: *op. cit., II*, p. 182.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 181. [4] *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 179, also Brown, *op. cit.* [6] Hamilton: *op. cit., I*, p. 121.
[7] *Selections from Raja Satara's and Peshwa's Diaries, II*, see cases under "Slavery".

empowered to inflict punishments on the slaves for their misdemeanour, and that the governments took cognizance of them only when they extended to their life.[1] The East India Company itself traded in slaves till 1764 and it was only in 1789 that their export was forbidden by proclamation. The import of slaves from Arabia continued as late as 1811.[2]

The accounts of the period under review are quite eloquent on society's connivance at traffic in slaves. Buchanan writes that the people of Assam sold "a good many slaves" and that the people of Bihar were willing to carry on the same trade.[3] About 1812 he estimated that one sixth of the population of Sylhet consisted of slaves—the descendants of insolvent debtors. In Kamrup, 12,000 slaves were freed from bondage by the English after its annexation.[4] In Central India, Malwa, Mewar and different parts of the Maratha dominion, we find whole castes engaged in criminal activity of stealing and selling children. The most notorious were the Minas, Banjaras and Goalas.[5] Many Maratha Brahmans, too, are mentioned as amassing wealth by this "shameless traffic". They sent large numbers of female slaves from Malwa to be sold at Poona at higher prices.[6] In Northern India, the boys of tender ages are mentioned as being kidnapped, mutilated and then sold for service in the harems of the nobility. The girls were also likewise abducted and given to brothels for a life of vice and shame.[7] At many places the sale of slave boys and girls was an open scandal. Bacon cites the case of the public sale of slave girls at Hardwar brought by a Punjabi.[8] South India, too, was not a stranger to such a trade. In Mysore, Tanjore, Malabar, the kidnapping of children and selling them as slaves was quite common and the British Government in the later 18th century had to adopt measures to suppress it.[9] Across the coastal regions, slave traffic was particularly brisk.[10] Europeans also appear making huge profits out of it through the Indian

[1] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 204.
[2] Archbold: *Outlines of Indian Constitutional History*, pp. 103-04.
[3] Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p. 496. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 289.
[5] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 199-202. Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 114-15.
[6] Malcolm: *op. cit. II*, p. 202, also footnote. [7] *Ibid.*, p. 199.
[8] Bacon: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 181.
[9] *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission, xviii, pp. 3-4.
[10] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 228.

agents. Pillai writes that in 1743, Parmanandan, a slave dealer, was cast into prison at Pondicherry. He was commissioned by Mons. Soude to get slaves. By using unfair means like intoxicants and spells, he inveigled many boys under his clutches. He used to kidnap them in batches of 50 or 100 from villages, "their heads were shaved, black cloths were given them to wear, and each individual had a fetter placed on one leg".[1]

In times of chronic scarcity in the necessaries of life, of famines, slave traffic swelled. Buchanan says that in the northern districts of the Company, the people of the labouring castes of Kurmis and Dhanuks gave themselves up as slaves "when they fall into distress".[2] Malcolm writes that in Central India, the lower classes sold their children to rich people during famines. In 1813-14 Ameer Khan formed a battalion of 1200 boys sold by parents.[3] Forbes tells us that during famines, astonishing numbers of people rushed to the sea-ports from the interior to sell their children.[4] The prices at which slaves were sold suggest how cheaply human life was disposed of in society.[5]

We can easily differentiate between two forms of slavery as it existed in the country, domestic slavery and feudal servitude. The slaves were a favourite passion of the nobility. They were utilized for domestic service and were also presented in marria-

[1] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 227-29.

[2] Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 125-26. [3] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 199-200.

[4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 228.

[5] At the beginning of the 19th century, the following were the usual prices of the slaves in the district of Purneah in Bengal.

A male slave of 16 years, from Rs. 12 to 20.

A female of 10 years, from Rs. 5 to 15.

An adult slave from Rs. 15 to 20.

(Martin: *op. cit.*, *III*, p, 496).

In Malwa, the female slaves could fetch "from forty and fifty to one hundred and one hundred and fifty rupees; the price is accordant with their appearance".

(Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 202).

South of Malabar, we find the following rates:

Young man and his wife, from 6 to 7 pounds.

They with two young children, from 9 to 10 pounds.

They with two more children who could be put to work, from 14 to 15 pounds.

Children, from 8 to 21 shillings.

(Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 228).

ges of daughters. In the opinion of Buchanan, domestic slavery, it was seen, was quite common "wherever the Muhammedan law prevails". Children born to slaves were also held in bondage by the masters.[1] In the province of Bihar, the male slaves called "Nafars" and female ones "Laundis" were very numerous. The "Molzadahs" formed a distinct caste of slaves whose girls were generally purchased for the harems.[2] The Abyssinian boys are also mentioned as quite popular with the Muslim nobility.[3] The women of Georgia, Circassia, Armenia, Persia and Kashmir, reputed for their beauty, were especially held in high estimation among the female slaves.[4] In Northern India, people of the castes of Rajputs, Khattris, Kayasthas are also stated to be fond of female slaves, and their children formed a single matrimonial group.[5] The vice of concubinage was a fruitful source of domestic female slavery. In Malwa and Rajputana, Malcolm writes that "mixed progeny" was fast increasing, and that the Rajput gentry carried to excess indulgence in female slaves.[6]

Serfdom implying property management of the landed proletariat, investing the owner of land with a proprietary right over the labourers permanently attached to his land, was also an odious feature of agrarian life in some parts. In South India, feudal servitude in its full rigour was prevalent only in Malabar, which, according to Dubois, preserved many ancient institutions intact. Here almost the entire community of Pariahs was treated as "an integral part" of the land on which it worked, and could be disposed of by the landed proprietors.[7] It is stated that in the territories of the Mysore State, certain low agricultural classes were formerly held as serfs for life but that Hyder Ali granted them the status of free tenants.[8] In Northern India, labour employed in agriculture were not generally held as slaves by the landed proprietors. But the vestiges of feudal servitude lingered, and people of certain castes are mentioned as often held as bondsmen for life by big landlords. In Bihar, these castes were Kurmis, Dhanuks and Rawaries.[9]

1 Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 126.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 125-26.

3 Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 224-25.

4 *Ibid*, p. 227. Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 85-6. *Qanoon-i-Islam*, p. 17.

5 Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 186.

6 Malcolm. *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 199, 201-02.

7 Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 57-8.

8 Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 19.

9 Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 126, 166, 480; *II*, pp. 99-100; *III*, 124-25, also Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.

It is difficult to justify slavery in any form—"disguise thyself as thou wilt", says Sterne, "still slavery thou art a bitter draught". It is, however, emphasized that in Indian society the slaves were treated with kindness and humanity. Forbes says that their chains were light and domestic slaves were not usually sold. The Muslim nobles called them "Seddees" or masters and often promoted their favourite slaves to great honours.[1] Ali writes that they were considered as members of the family and their welfare was a special interest to their masters. Harsh punishments were inflicted only when they maltreated their masters.[2] Their marriages were arranged and their children were brought up with care.[3]

The slave for the field was, however, a different creature, not honoured like the "titled slave", "clothed with purple or fine linen" serving in the *Zenanas* of the grandies. The allowances given to him for nourishment were a poor compensation for his labour. Their half-starved appearance, their hard toil, marked them out as victims of an oppressive feudal economy. Their allowances were only about three-fourth of the allowances for a hired servant. Their habitations in Malabar were little better than large baskets placed near the stacks of rice fields.[4] But on the whole, the treatment of slaves does not appear to be cruel and inhuman and we may agree with Colebrooke:

> "Indeed, throughout India, the relation of master and slave appears to impose the duty of protection and cherishment on the masters, as much as that of fidelity and obedience on the slave, and their mutual conduct is consistent with the sense of such an obligation; since it is marked with gentleness and indulgence on the one side, and with zeal and loyalty on the other."[5]

In a vast country like India, it is idle to look for a uniform code of social morality or cultural homogeneity. Besides the customs of *Sati*, or slavery which were time-honoured social usages, we come across many other odious practices mentioned in the European accounts. It appears that in the 18th century,

[1] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 224-25, 227, 473. [2] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 88.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 59-61. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 370, 406-07; *III*, p. 36.
[5] Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, p. 80.

there was deterioration in the cultural life of society and voluntary immolations came to be frequently practised under duress. The practice of "Dherna" or "Koor", mentioned in connection with the Brahmans and Bhats were tortures undertaken to remedy grievances from which they were immune under normal conditions.[1] Practices like that of "Kashi-karvat" or drowning of patients in the rivers were rare cases showing helplessness against serious diseases.[2] The human sacrifices mentioned in connection with the Khonds of Orissa were relics of barbarism from which the civilized life was not altogether free in every part of the country.[3]

[1] *Asiatic Researches*: *IV*, pp. 356-57, 359. Coleman: *op. cit.*, p. 148. Forbes *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 379-80.

[2] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 26. Martin: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 114-15; *III*, p. 164. Tennant: *op. cit.*, p. 156. Duff: *op. cit.*, pp. 207-12.

[3] *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission *XIII*, pp. 49-50.

*Chapter Nine*

# Economic Life of People

IN THE Eighteenth Century, the foreigners were impressed with India's enormous wealth. Her arts and industries were highly developed to meet the requirements of an easy, comfortable living in society. According to the testimony of the European critics, India was the industrial workshop of the Asiatic countries and also a completely self-sufficient economic unit. On the basis of their accounts, we shall here attempt to analyse the economic resources of society and the material pursuits of its people. Without a proper appreciation of these it is difficult to appraise the standards of living of the different social groups.

## *Natural Wealth*

Writing about 1744, Abbe de Guyon observes that the riches of India "make our merchants (European) forget the trouble, the fatigue, and danger of a long and painful navigation; the learned throughout Europe carefully seek after its animals and plants, to study the singularities of nature, more various and fertile in these countries than in ours; its beauties adorn the palaces of princes, and add splendour to the diadem of sovereigns".[1] There was no country in the world which had gold, silver, jewels, "cottons, silks, stuffs, cocoas in greater plenty".[2] The kingdom of Bengal was the most fertile part in the production of sugar, silk, fruits, saltpetre, gumlac, wax, civet, opium, pepper and rice. The banks of its rivers were dotted with towns and villages, and rich fields of rice and sugar "much larger than those of Europe". Many kinds of pulses, mustard, citrons, fruits, and mulberry trees nourishing silk worms were produced and "the finest canes, which are brought into Europe, come from this kingdom".[3] Abbe Raynal describes India as "one of

[1] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 260.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 271-72.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 276-77.

the most fertile regions of the world yielding "choicest productions", "delicious fruits", and rich wealth in forests, plants and flowers. The imperishable genius of its soil, excepting "a few sandy and barren districts", utilized for "so many ages" still made it "the most fruitful colony in the world".[1] To Dubois, India appeared as Nature's most favoured land. He writes:

"The great wealth accumulated by a few of its native princes, the large fortunes so rapidly acquired by many Europeans, its valuable diamond mines, the quality and quantity of its pearls, the abundance of its spices and scented woods, the fertility of its soil, and, at one time, the unrivalled superiority of its various manufactures: all these have caused admiration and wonder from time immemorial."[2]

Rev. William Tennant of the Anglican Church held that Nature intended India "to be the paradise of the world",[3] and many others have expressed similar sentiments. The English sailor who visited Bengal (1745-49) found it the most flourishing province of India and thought that wealth flowed in it "to an amazing extent".[4]

India's natural wealth in forests, minerals, plants and precious stones was prodigious. Rennell writes of India's forest wealth which provided timber for building, fuel, and led to the development of Indian industries like the construction of boats and ships.[5] The provinces of Berar and Khandesh were reputed for their mines of gold and precious stones, and the richness of the kingdom of Golconda was attributed to its rich "mines of gold, diamonds, sapphires and precious stones".[6] The Mysore districts of Ellore and Nellore were famous for diamond and copper mines.[7] According to Robert Orme, the diamond mines were the property of the Mughal sovereign who received "a vast revenue from the farmers admitted to work". The penalty of concealing a large stone is reported to be death and was executed with rigour.[8] The author of *Araish-i-Mahfil* writes that the mountains of Kumaon were full of rich minerals—gold, silver, copper, lead, iron,

[1] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 44-5.
[2] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 81.
[3] Tennant: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 13.
[4] *Voyage of H.M.S. Harwich, Bengal Past and Present 1933*, 45, p. 101.
[5] Rennell: *op. cit.*, pp. 68-70.
[6] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I.* pp. 279, 338.
[7] Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 92-108.
[8] Orme: *op. cit.*, pp. 414-15.

sulpher and borax. Popular superstition credited the "gravel" of that region with the virtue of the Philosopher's Stone.[1] North of Bengal, at "Soumelpur", it is mentioned that diamonds were recovered from the bed of the river up to the source in the mountains, and that "commonly eight or ten thousand persons" were employed in this work. "It is from thence", we learn, that "these fine sparks of diamonds come, called genuine sparks".[2] Add to these, India's wealth in rivers, Nature's fertilizers of its extensive plains, and highways of internal commerce, and we get an adequate idea of the country's resources to feed a large population. Foreign accounts emphasize that in the period under review, scared by wars, famines and epidemics, India was a populated country, and its capacity to recuperate loss in population was remarkable.[3]

## *Economic Pursuits of People*

Agriculture was the primary source of livelihood to the masses living in India's rural areas. The various festivals in honour of seasons, and at the harvest time popular in the country show that it was considered an honourable occupation. The actual tilling of land was of course left to labour drawn mostly from the lower castes, or to the poor farmers who could not hire labour, and who worked on their fields. According to Dubois, in South India, about the beginning of the 19th century, agricultural labour of the lower *Sudra* castes doing hardest manual labour for a nominal wage comprised about half of the total population.[4] The peasants who cultivated their own lands, whose property ranged from "£ 5 to £ 25 sterling", were about six-twentieth of the entire population. They, like their brethren weavers, barbers, washermen, etc., were a poor lot, living in thatched mud-hut and owning a nominal property consisting "of a few cattle, a few small gold and silver trinkets, one or two copper vessels for drinking and a few more for eating purposes, and some iron-farm implements". They were never safe from

[1] *Ariash-i-Mahfil*, p. 58. [2] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 278.

[3] See Chapter *I*, pp. 49-50.

[4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83. His estimate also includes low castes engaged in menial offices, beggars, etc. 1/4 of population.

the claws of the money-lenders and managed to eke out a hand-to-mouth existence.[1] The higher classes, owning large landed property, managed to secure a fairly comfortable life, and professions connected with land were maintaining about 90 per cent of the population.[2]

From contemporary accounts it is difficult to gather any positive evidence regarding large-scale farming. In South India and Maharashtra, where the village community organization continued to function effectively throughout the period, the proprietary rights vested in the *Ryats* did not encourage cultivation of village lands on modern lines of collective large-scale farming.[3] In fertile and thickly populated areas, land was intensely cultivated. In certain areas like the bed of the river Cauvery, we learn that land yielded three crops of rice in the same year.[4] Two harvests were, however, the universal rule in fertile tracts and for about a quarter of the year, in the months of July, August and September, in South India agricultural labour is mentioned as idle.[5] It is difficult to state how far the Indian farmer was conversant with the principles of rotation of crops. Writing on the state of agriculture near Seringapatam, Buchanan observes that succession of crops was utterly unknown.[6] The cultivator was, however, not ignorant of the fertility of different soils to different kinds of produce. In South India, the village revenue accounts classified lands under eight different categories suitable for separate items of agricultural produce.[7] The importance of manuring the lands, too, was realized, though in the fertile plains soil was not extensively manured, and at some places in Bengal, seldom manured. Sometimes, writes Stavorinus, the refuse of the fields was burnt and its ashes served the purpose. Cow-dung was mostly utilized for fuel.[8] About Mysore peasants Buchanan reports:

> "A good deal of attention is here paid to manuring the soil. Every farmer has a dung-hill; which is prepared by digging a pit of sufficient extent, in this is collected the whole of the

1 Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 85-6.
2 *Ibid.*, pp. 86-92.
3 Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 24.
4 Raynal: *History, I*, p. 518.
5 Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 87.
6 Buchanan: *op. cit., I*, pp. 125-26.
7 Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 3-5.
8 Stavorinus: *op. cit., II*; p. 453.

> dung and litter of the cattle from the houses where they are kept, together with all the ashes and soil of the family."

He also refers to the system of mixing up manures prevalent in the province of Mysore.[1]

The implements of husbandry, the plough, the spade, the sickle, etc., were coarse and crude but they did not prevent the peasant from raising a rich harvest according to the soil.[2] In the provinces of Bengal and Gujarat, it is mentioned that bad harvests occurred very seldom. Of cultivation in Mysore, Wilks writes: "The whole world does not, perhaps, exhibit a cleaner system of husbandry than that of the cultivation of Ragee . . . in the home-fields of Mysore."[3] In Indian economy, the farmer occupied a key-position. He supplied provisions of fooding and raw materials for the industries of the country. In India, the system of plantations and gardens, too, was carried to perfection, and the skill of the Indian farmer has been highly spoken of in European accounts. Buchanan writes that the plantation of the gardens was universal and was done on an extensive scale. In South India also, the plantation in the "Mussulman fashion", that is, "to have separate piece of ground allotted for each kind of plant", was popular. "Thus one plot is entirely filled with rose-trees, another with pomegranates, and so forth," says he.[4] Everywhere there was abundance of gardens of fruits, flowers, betel-leaf, cocoa-nut and other plants in the South.[5] Of the cocoa-tree, Abbe de Guyon writes:

> "Of all the trees that grow upon the face of the earth, none is so serviceable as the cocoa. It alone can supply all the necessities of mankind. Its pith, liquor, and fruit are sufficient to support the Indians, who are naturally sober . . . ."

Its leaves were used for making "cloths", covering of houses, sails of boats, and a variety of other purposes.[6] In Bengal, the author of *Ryaz* writes that "plantations have no end".[7] He mentions mangoes, oranges, citrons, lemons, pineapples, cocoa-

[1] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 122.
[2] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 391-92. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 106-07.
[3] Wilks: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 209, footnote. [4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 46.
[5] *Ibid.*, *I*, pp. 41, 111-12, 114-15, 155-57, 327-28, 383-87; *II*, pp. 54-55, 110-14. [6] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 326-31.
[7] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*: p. 23.

nuts, palm-fruits, jack-fruits, planted successfully in Bengal. Grapes and melons did not thrive there.[1] Stavorinus mentions guavas and bananas in addition to these.[2] Ali has described at length the country's fruits and so also the author of *Araish-i-Mahfil.* The plantation of fruits was certainly carried out on a large scale; melons, apples, pomegranates, peaches, figs, grapes, bananas, mangoes, etc., of different varieties were produced abundantly.[3] According to Heyne, apples, peaches and grapes produced in India were not inferior in taste to those of other parts.[4] It is, however, difficult to state how far in the 18th century European fruits like strawberry, cherry, pear, plum, chestnut, walnut, olive, cultivated in the European gardens at the settlements, were acceptable to Indian tastes.[5] There is no reference to their being taken up in Indian plantations till the close of the century. The Indian cultivator had, however, begun growing many European vegetables in his fields extensively and they had almost become staple produce. Among these, mention may be made of "peas, beans, salad, parsley, spinach, cabbages, radishes, and asparagus . . . ."[6] Ives refers to "the endless variety of vegetables" used by Indians in their curries and soups, and mentions the following introduced by Europeans: celery, lettuce, onions, parsley, mint, artichoke, spinach, radish, turnip, cabbage, etc.[7]

These accounts clearly establish that the Indian peasant, whether in respect of the production of foodgrains, or vegetables or of plantations, was an ingenious and adaptable being. But the accounts hint that agriculture alone as a profession was not highly remunerative. Cattle was almost the chief wealth of the Indian farmer and he substantially augmented his returns from land in the profits of dairy, produce of milk, ghee, and curd.[8] Owing to the lavish utilization of man-power, want of capital, cheapness of provisions, the margin of profit to the peasant from agriculture after deduction of village dues and state demands was not an adequate compensation to his hard toil. He

[1] *Ryaz-us-Salatin:* p. 23. [2] Stavorinus: *op. cit., I,* pp. 391-92, 395.

[3] Ali: *op. cit., II,* pp. 182-219. *Araish-i-Mahfil,* pp. 15-6.

[4] Heyne: *op. cit.,* pp. 344-45. [5] *Ibid.*

[6] Stavorinus: *op. cit., I,* pp. 395-96. [7] Ives: *op. cit.,* p. 19.

[8] Colebrooke: *op. cit.,* pp. 68-9. Heyne: *op. cit.,* p. 73.

had naturally to fall on allied industries, plantation of orchards, dairy-farming or greater cultivation of raw materials for manufacture of finished goods.[1] Also agricultural occupation could not provide full employment to labour for the whole year, and in India "the loom" is emphasized as filling in the gap. Colebrooke remarks for Bengal, where the cotton and silk manufactures had attained to a high pitch of perfection, that it was characteristic of labour to turn from its usual occupation to an allied one or altogether to a new one.[2] Robert Orme also emphasizes that "the vocation from agriculture leaves a much greater number of inhabitants than can be spared in others, at leisure to apply themselves to the loom". This relationship between agriculture and loom was most pronounced in Bengal which produced silk and cotton textiles three times more than that of the rest of the country and "at much cheaper rates".[3] This vocational mobility of Indian rural labour was also made possible because of its free character. It was only in Malabar and a few other parts of deep South that rural labour was held under laws of slavery;[4] elsewhere it was free.

With all his skill and industry, the Indian farmer could not completely overcome his dependence on nature. Failure of rains, or excessive floods, often damaged his crops severely and rendered him a destitute.[5] Artificial devices as aids to agriculture were, however, in use in every part of the country according to local conditions. Where the floods in the rivers were a recurring calamity, as in Bengal, dikes were constructed where scarcity of rains and water was a usual feature, tanks or reservoirs were used for storage of water. Wells for irrigating fields were a common feature of rural life.[6] Contemporary accounts point out that irrigation through artificial means was at a high level of efficiency. In those regions which could not draw their supplies of water from rivers, deep and extensive tanks, many measuring 3 or 4 hundred feet on sides, with a short temple adorning them were in use. Craufurd mentions

[1] Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, p. 31. Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 67-8, 73, 85-6.
[2] Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 31. [3] Orme: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 4.
[4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 370.
[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 453. Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.
[6] Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, p. 7. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 396.

that from certain superstition, square tanks were not constructed.[1] About Bengal, Ghulam Hussain writes:

> "Rivers, small and large, are plenty in this country and the practice of digging tanks is very common. People in this country seldom drink the water of wells because everywhere the water of rivers and tanks is found in abundance. And generally the water of wells is salt, but with a little digging of the soil water comes out."[2]

Elphinstone reports that on the rivers of Khandesh expensive embankments had been erected for irrigation purposes.[3] In Rohilkhand, the Rohilla chiefs had constructed aqueducts "traversing corn-fields in all directions". In the hilly areas, artificial dams were built and filled from mountain streams.[4] In the early part of the 19th century, Bishop Heber described Bharatpur state as "one of the best cultivated and watered tracts which I have seen in India".[5] Under Indian governments, the welfare of the peasant was the first concern of the state. The Mughals had earned a name for themselves for the construction of extensive canals, and the governments, which succeeded them, acted on their example. Elphinstone confesses that with all the defects of the Maratha government, people were happier under them than under the East India Company and that the country flourished.[6] Of Indian governments, he further observes:

> "It has not happened to me ever to see countries better cultivated and more abounding in all the produce of the soil as well as in commercial wealth than the southern Mahratha districts . . . there was as much cultivation in the Deccan as it was possible for an arid and unfruitful country to admit. I do not think either commercial or agricutural interests are likely to be improved by our rule."[7]

[1] Craufurd: *op. cit.*, pp. 92-3. [2] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 23.
[3] Elphinstone: *op. cit.* p. 4. [4] Francklin: *Shah Alum*, Appendix II, p. 239.
[5] Reynolds: *White Sahibs in India*, p. 45. [6] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 91.
[7] Reynolds: *op. cit.*, p. 43.
In 1799, Lt.-Col. Moore described the condition of Tipu's dominions when a person, travelling through a strange country, finds it well cultivated, populous with industrious inhabitants, cities well founded, commerce extending, towns increasing, and everything flourishing so as to indicate happiness, he naturally concludes the form of government congenial to the people. This is a picture of Tipu's government." *Ibid.*, p. 42.

### *Agricultural Production*

We know that Indian territories not directly under the Company's rule give a pleasing picture of the state of cultivation and the devotion of people to the agricultural pursuits, their simple, honest and hard-working habits. The country was not only self-sufficient in production of foodstuffs, but could also spare surplus to meet shortages in times of scarcity and famines. Bengal was the most productive of all the provinces in India; all kinds of grains, pulses, spices were produced in abundance. Even wheat is mentioned as a favourite produce of its fields. "To mention all the particular species of goods that this rich country produces is far beyond my skill," says a contemporary English observer.[1] In the produce of raw silk from cocoons and mulberry trees, it had no rival, and Malda was the greatest centre of the produce of raw silk from silk-worms.[2] A great variety of fruits, vegetables, oils, and other articles of diet were produced with great ease; sugar, requiring "more attentive cultivation", throve everywhere, while rice, writes Orme, was produced in lower regions" in such plenty . . . that it is often sold at the rate of two pounds for a farthing".[3] According to Alexander Dow, much of the land in Bengal had become a desert under oppressions and famines (1770-71). Even so it could produce provisions "for double the number", that is about 30 millions of lives.[4] The Dutch Admiral has mentioned wheat as one of its chief agricultural products which was sent to Batavia in large quantities. But under the influence of the Company, its cultivation was being discouraged to favour the corn trade of the Cape of Good Hope.[5] In Bengal, betel-nut was also an important produce of plantations.[6]

The entire Indo-Gangetic belt from the Punjab down to Bengal was the most productive region of the country. Different kinds of grains, pulses, sugarcane, tobacco, opium, salt were produced in abundance and were exported outside.[7] The province of Bihar was far-famed for its opium, producing about 16,000 maunds,

[1] Wheeler: *Early Records*, p. 197; also *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 23.
[2] Milburn: *Oriental Commerce*, *II*, pp. 243-44; also *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 46.
[3] Orme: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 4. [4] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, see "State of Bengal".
[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 391. [6] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 184.
[7] Francklin: *op. cit.*, pp. 56, 229-40. Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3, 22-3, 71.

"the largest part of which is employed in inland trade, and is conveyed by land carriage from Indostan to almost every part of Asia".[1] It also produced saltpetre in large quantities which, because of its use in the manufacture of gun-powder, formed the chief item of the English Company's investment.[2] The region adjoining Delhi was rich in productions of corn, rice, millets, and indigo.[3] The soil of Rohilkhand is spoken of as "uncommonly fertile, capable of the highest cultivation, abounding in all sorts of grain, sugarcane, and tobacco". It was well supplied with water from its large rivers and their tributaries.[4] In foodstuffs, even Rajputana, a comparatively dry region, was self-sufficient, and Malwa Flat, "higher than the rest of Hindostan", was generally fertile abounding in cattle, opium, indigo, and tobacco.[5] Gujarat, in the south-west, was another most fertile part of the country, producing wheat, rice, barley and other coarse grains in abundance, as also cotton, indigo and tobacco. Forbes says that the whole province looked like "a luxuriant garden".[6] Provisions were very cheap and none could complain of poverty. A small family of simple habits could comfortably live on an annual expenditure of 40 to 50 rupees and even "perhaps for less".[7] The country around Surat was so fertile that "scarcely a piece of uncultivated ground is to be seen, or any spot that does not yield some useful production".[8] Grains including wheat, rice, other articles for manufacture of oils, tobacco, etc., were produced in plenty.[9] All along the Western Coast, rice grew plentifully, and Khandesh is mentioned as an "exceedingly fertile province", "watered by innumerable streams". Though its many parts had been deserted owing to the ravages of Holkar's army in 1803, they conveyed "a high notion of their former richness and prosperity". The valleys of the rivers were highly cultivated and the "beautiful country" round Ahmednagar, Poona, Satara was "one sheet of the richest cultivation".[10]

In central parts of India, Berar, the land of the black soil,

[1] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 478. Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, pp. 71-2.

[2] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 238-39. [3] Francklin: *op. cit.*, pp. 207-08.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 56. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 121.

[6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 466-67; *II*, pp. 184, 284. [7] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 485.

[8] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 453. [9] *Ibid.*, pp. 454-55.

[10] Elphinstone: *op. cit*, pp. 1, 4, 7.

was most fertile for the produce of cotton, and also grains, wheat, barley, vetches, flax. Nagpur wheat was celebrated for its high nutritive value and took only three months to nurture.[1] Berar and the adjoining areas were in a very thriving condition in the pre-Maratha period under their Gond princes who continued to rule at Mandla. In 1806, we read of "the undoubted signs of enviable prosperity" of this region even without the benefit of "navigation from Nerbudda" and without much "inland commerce". The reason was that "under the fostering hand of a race of the Gond princes, a numerous people tilled a fertile country; and still preserved the neatness of their houses, in the number and magnificence of their temples, their ponds, and other public works, in the size of their towns, and in the frequency of their plantations."[2] The territories of Mysore were likewise rich in productions of foodstuffs, cotton, and sugar[3]. The Northern Circars, well watered by numerous rivers, yielded rich harvest in grains and pulses, chiefly rice, *Bajra*, *Juar*, and are described as "the granary of the Carnatic".[4] The coastal regions further south were noted for rice, fish, and produced spices in abundance. These spices of Malabar—cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, pepper, etc.,—formed the chief articles of foreign trade.[5]

The above survey leaves us in no doubt about India's complete self-sufficiency in foodgrains and other elements of dietary. During the period, however, the ravages of soldiery resulted in devastating many tracts, but the decline in cultivation does not appear to have affected the country's resources to feed its population. It was only in the British territories that rural poverty assumed hideous character later and where the decline in industries also affected the prosperity of agricultural classes.

## *Industrial Production*

Handicrafts were an important source of livelihood to a large part of the population. Till the end of the 18th century, India's

[1] Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 327-28.
[2] *Asiatic Annual Register, 1806*, Miscellaneous Tracts, p. 32.
[3] Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 36-8, 46-9, 43-5.
[4] *British India Analysed*; *III*, pp. 653-54, also Milburn: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 86.
[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 219-22. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 436-44.

reputation as a great manufacturing country stood high in the world. The countries from China to Peru prized her manufactures. Early in the 17th century, Pelsaert was amazed by the intricate processes of manufacture "for a job which one man would in Holland here passes through four men's hands before it is finished."[1] In 1813, Sir Thomas Munro wrote of India's good system of agriculture, and unrivalled manufacturing skill indicating a high degree of civilization.[2] The distractions of the period told heavily on India's industrial production, still India retained her preeminent position in the world in cotton and silk manufactures on which foreign accounts throw vivid light. The technical skill, dexterity, and imitative faculty of the Indian artisan in general have been commended by many. The authors of the *European in India* emphasized that the Indian artisan was highly skilled and was without a rival in any other part of the world. Some of the manufactures of his simple, almost primitive tools were "of incomparable excellence and beauty."[3] Dubois praises the skill of "native work-men"—the fineness of the manufactures was in sharp contrast to the simplicity of the tools. "With such simple tools the patient Hindu", says he, "thanks to his industry, can produce specimens of work which are often not to be distinguished from those imported at great expense from foreign countries.[4] Stavorinus says that Europeans were surprised "to behold the perfection of manufactures, which is exemplified here (Bengal) in almost every handicraft, effected with so few, and such imperfect tools".[5] Even Robert Orme admits that "the arts which furnish the conveniences of life have been carried by the Indians to a pitch far beyond which is necessary to supply the wants of a climate which knows so few". He further observes that the knowledge of Indians in "mechanical powers is very confined" but Europeans were "left to admire, without being able to account for" the mode with which people built their huge temples and constructed their bridges. His statement that "no ideas of taste or fine design have existed among them" requires to be categorically refuted.[6] He himself writes that in cotton

[1] Pelsaert: *op. cit.*, p. 60. [2] See Chapter *I*.

[3] Doyle: *op. cit.*, Introduction. [4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.

[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 413-14.

[6] Orme: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 7.

manufacture, almost every district produced a "distinct kind of cloth", and the "fabric has been transmitted, perhaps for centuries, from father to son", a custom which contributed to "the perfection of the manufacture".[1] It could certainly not be possible, were ideas of taste or design not a vital factor influencing the range and perfection of the Indian handicrafts. The imitative faculty and general skill of the Indian artisans, weavers, carpenters, goldsmiths, silversmiths, and other "mechanics", the intelligence of Indian tailors, barbers, shoe-makers, etc., has been praised by many.[2] Writing on Patna, Forster observes:

> "The different manufactures of silver, iron, and wood are little inferior in this city to those of Europe: and when the rudeness of the tools, with the simplicity of the process is examined, the degree of delicacy, which the artisans have acquired in their several professions, must challenge a high admiration."[3]

Of the superior technical perfection of India's cotton manufactures, there is ample evidence. The clamour of English weavers throughout the 18th century against East India Company's imports of cloth from India shows their genuine fears of extinction in the face of competition with Indian fabrics. After the middle of the century, even when a mechanical revolution had been effected in English industry, consequent upon the inventions of Hargreave (1767) and Arkwright (1773), England viewed Indian textiles with alarm and indignation. Only vigorous state action in banning their use strengthened English industry to stand on its feet. As late as 1815 we find that Indian textiles were considered far superior to those of England. Merely by touch, writes Milburn, people could discover whether they were manufactured in India or Europe.[4]

## *Organization of Industry*

The organization of industry was based on small-scale handicraft economy. It did not promote capitalistic interests in industry, and did not necessitate elaborate financial investments to run it. The Indian artisan had no stock of capital save his tools and

[1] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 413. [2] Ives: *op. cit*, pp. 52-3. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 411-12. [3] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 24-5. [4] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 232-33, 236.

habitation, and worked on "contract" or advance system. Under old conditions of a strong flourishing aristocracy, he did not fear unemployment. The patronage of the gentry and the demand for his goods both for internal and outside consumption was great, and was his greatest security. Forster says:

"The native princes, and chiefs of a various description, the retainers of numerous dependents, afforded a constant employment to a vast number of ingenious manufacturers, who supplied their masters with gold and silver stuffs, curiously flowered, plain muslins, a diversity of beautiful silks, and other articles of Asiatic luxury."[1]

The Indian courts spent enormous sums on distribution of rich robes of honour to officers and persons of rank, and this practice made them big consumers of the indigenous textile manufactures of fine quality.[2] We learn that out of the total manufactures (cotton and silk) of Dacca, those worth Rs. 1,00,000 and Rs. 3,00,000 were exclusively meant for the Emperor at Delhi and the Nawab at Murshidabad respectively.[3] In connection with the contracts which merchants placed with the manufacturers, we have the following observation of Buchanan on the weavers at Bangalore:

"When the goods are in much demand, it is customary for the merchant to advance one half, or even the whole, of the price of the goods, which he commissions; but when the demand is small, the manufacturers borrow money from the bankers at two per cent a month, and make goods, which they sell to the merchants of the place. They never carry them to the public market."[4]

In such a system, their profits out of industry were largely swallowed up by the middle-men, who also figure prominently in European purchase of goods in the country. The European factors advanced *Dadni* to their *Dalals* or agents to purchase their goods from the manufacturers and the system acquired the name of investment, the contracting party establishing "a prior

[1] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 3-4.

[2] *Fourth Report*, Committee of Secrecy, 1773, p. 113

[3] Taylor: *A Description and Historical Account of the Cotton Manufacturers of Dacca*, pp. 130-31.

[4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 212.

right to the goods for which they contracted".[1] These middle-merchants acquired great influence over Europeans and accumulated huge fortunes,[2] but the poor manufacturer did not gain much. With the establishment of the foreign power, he was denied the generosity of princes "as poor as beggars", his condition deteriorated further. The economic condition of artisans and manufacturing classes "of all degress" suffered seriously.[3] "As to the manufacturer himself", writes Dubois, "his poverty corresponds to the simplicity of his workshop." Here is a description of the weaver's workshop from him:

"The establishments producing magnificent stuffs as delicate muslins, fine cloths, and beautiful coloured cottons . . . were wretched thatched huts, built of mud, twenty to thirty feet long by seven or eight feet broad. In such a work-room the weaver stretches his frame, squats on the ground, and quietly plies his shuttle . . . . The instruments he makes use of are extremely primitive, and his whole stock in trade could easily be carried about by one man. Such is, in very truth, an exact picture of an Indian factory."[4]

## *Range of Industry*

Complex specialization in crafts was a prominent feature of the handicrafts of the period. The different classes which earned their livelihood through them from weaving of cloth down to the tanning of leather specialized in particular craft and acquired great proficiency.[5] Of Bengal, Stavorinus writes:

"Artificers confine themselves to one sort of work so that a goldsmith will not work in silver nor a silversmith in gold. In the aurungs, or looms, a weaver will only weave one single sort of stuff during the whole life, unless he be compelled to take another in hand."[6]

According to Robert Orme, specialization in trades in India was more advanced than in Europe.[7] A study of Indian manufactures on regional basis would also bear out how different

[1] Grant: *op. cit.*, p. 67.
[2] Pillai: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 310; *II*, pp. 96, 142, 155-56; *IV*, pp. 230-31.
[3] Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 261. [4] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 81-2.
[5] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 432-33. [6] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 411.
[7] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 410.

localities had become centres of special manufactures which, for their superior technical merits, were in great demand in other regions. By 18th century, localization in manufactures had made great progress in the country as will be illustrated later by a study of the manufactures of different centres of industry. For the sake of clarification, we may arrange India's production as follows:

*Rural Industries:* Manufactures dependent on raw materials obtained from agriculture such as cotton and silk textiles, sugar, tobacco, opium, etc.

*Metallic Industries*: Manufactures of steel, glass, arms, etc.

*Miscellaneous Industries*: construction of boats, manufacture of salt, ice, oils, perfumes, intoxicants, drugs, dyes, spices, etc.

*Industrial Arts*: Embroidery, cloth-printing, dyeing, designing, jewellery, etc.

The industries of the first category were widespread as they went side by side with agriculture. Of these the cotton and silk manufactures were the premier industry, the rest were mostly for local requirements. Manufactures of sugar and tobacco, too, were as universal as that of cotton, but did not command an extensive market outside. Contemporary data on cotton manufactures is quite exhaustive, and we shall deal with them at length.

## *Cotton Manufactures*

In the 18th century the loom was the mainstay of India's industrial economy. It provided employment to "hundreds of thousands of the inhabitants, composing the weaver caste" and to "countless widows" and families who maintained themselves by cotton spinning.[1] Besides agriculture, spinning was an important rural profession. To the women of the lower classes the spinning industry provided substantial income and also met their requirements of clothing, etc. In the cottages of the poor, we have references in contemporary Bengali literature to old women spinning thread in the late hours of the night.[2]

The weaving industry was spread over the entire country "from the banks of the Ganges to the Cape". It was, however,

[1] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 95. [2] Datta: *Bengal Subah*, pp. 43-4, also. footnotes p. 44.

observed, remarks Raynal, "that the fine sorts are made in the eastern parts, the common ones in the centre, and the coarse ones in the most western districts".[1] All foreign accounts testify to the excellence of cotton manufactures of the country, and those of Bengal acquired a reputation which now appears to be a great exaggeration. The high development of the textile industry presented a puzzle to Robert Orme, and his explanation of it is not only original and absurd but quite interesting as it shows the regional distribution of high quality, good quality and coarse manufactures. According to him, the excellence of these manufactures was a particular manifestation of the "effeminacy" of the nation. "It is to the suppleness with which the whole frame of an Indian is endowed", writes he, "and which is still more remarkable in the configuration of his hand, that we are indebted for the exquisite perfection of their manufacture of linen. The same instruments, which an Indian employs to make a piece of cambric, would, under the rigid fingers of an European, scarcely produce a piece of canvas.[2] At another place he observes "that the manufactures of cloth prevail most both in quality and perfection, in those provinces where the people are least capable of robust labours" as spinning and weaving required no "manly exertions". "In the northern parts of the kingdom, where the men have more bodily strength they weave . . . the coarsest cloths". On the coast of Coromandal and in Bengal, "it is difficult to find a village in which every man, woman and child is not employed in making a piece of cloth".[3] He has also emphasized the role of women in the cotton industry, from the winding of the raw threads to the spinning of the thread.[4]

The cotton manufactures of the provinces of Bengal, Gujarat, Mysore and northern parts of the Madras Presidency were reputed for their high quality, and were in great demand in the foreign markets. In Bengal, almost every district could boast of a special brand, and it would unnecessarily prolong the chapter if an account of each were to be attempted.[5] About 1772, Pattullo wrote that "the demands for Bengal manufactures

[1] Raynal: *op. cit., I*, p. 456.
[2] Orme: *op. cit., I*, p. 7.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 409.
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 412-13.
[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit., I*, p. 474.

can never lessen, in regard that their quality is so peculiar to that country that no nation on the globe can either equal or rival them".[1] Bengal produced "cloth of all kinds, most beautiful muslins, silk, raw or worked".[2] The towns like Baranagar (near Calcutta), Radhanagar, Nadia, Murshidabad, Santipur, Cossimbazar, Chittagong, Rajmahal, and others were noted for their cotton manufactures.[3] The town of Dacca enjoyed undisputed superiority in manufacture of cotton cloth. Its delicate piece-goods were highly prized in foreign markets, and in the seraglios of Indian princes and chiefs. Its muslins which were intended for consumption in the Imperial family were "of such wonderful fineness as to exceed ten times the price of any linens permitted to be made for Europeans, or anyone else in the kingdom".[4] Of them at Dacca, Stavorinus writes:

> "Muslins are sometimes wove so fine that a piece of twenty yards in length, and longer can be enclosed in a common pocket tobacco box."

The size of the tobacco box is mentioned about 8 inches long, 1 inch deep, and 4 inches in breadth.[5] The Company classified Dacca muslins into four grades—"ordinary, fine, superfine, and fine superfine". The embroidery and flower works on them too were excellent.[6] In 1744, Abbe de Guyon observed:

> "From Dacca come the best and finest Indian embroideries in gold, silver, or silk, and those embroidered neck cloths and fine muslins which are seen in France."[7]

The province of Bihar was also famous for "cloths of different kinds, of good texture" and the muslins of Shaikhpura were celebrated for their fineness.[8] We learn that carpets were also manufactured "from the linseed plant" which were pretty and much liked.[9] Northern India produced coarse cotton cloths of different varieties in abundance, but Varanasi, Mirzapur, Ghazipur, Tanda, Jaunpur manufactured great quantities of fine

[1] Pattullo: *Essay on Bengal*, p. 25. [2] Hill: *op. cit. II*, p. 216.

[3] Holwell: *op. cit.*, pp. 200-04. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 472-74, 464, 519. Rennell: *op. cit.*, p. 75. Grose: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 236, 240. Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, pp. 496-98. Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 82, 106-07, 110, 118-19.

[4] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 412.

[5] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 413; also footnote p. 414.

[6] Taylor: *op. cit.*, pp. 41-2. [7] *Ibid.* [8] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 82.

[9] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 23.

cloth, which were brought down to Calcutta through the Ganga for export to European markets.[1] Patiala, in Punjab, is mentioned as famous for its excellent cloth.[2] Chanderi, in Madhya Pradesh, produced cloths of very superior quality and they were exported to other parts of India.[3]

In Gujarat, spinning and cotton industry were very popular. Its cotton manufactures did not equal the muslins of Bengal "in fineness and delicacy" but are mentioned of "an exquisite texture".[4] Malot writes that in the manufacture of cotton fabrics "it (Gujarat) confessedly excels all the world", "though the fabric and sale of its finest white cloths have suffered an irrecoverable blow in the annihilation of the Mughal Empire, in the elegance and refinement of which sprang their chief consumption."[5] Baroach, Jumbaseer, Ahmedabad, etc., were famous for their manufacture of "piece-goods, chintzes, and cloths of all sorts."[6] About the manufactures of Ahmedabad before the middle of the 18th century, we have the following account:

> "People of all nations, and all kinds of mercantile goods throughout Asia are to be found at Amadabad. Brocades of gold and silver, carpets with flowers of gold, tho' not so good as the Persian velvets, satins, and taffatas of all colours, stuffs, of silk, linen and cotton, and calicoes, are all manufactured here "[7]

On the south-west side, Surat was not only a great emporium of foreign commerce but also famous for its manufactures of "finest Indian brocades, the richest silk stuffs of all kinds, calicoes and muslins".[8] The Northern Circars are, likewise, described as the home of cotton manufactures of all varieties. They formed "the ground work of the best printed calicoes in Europe".

[1] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 137, 156, 321, 329-30. Also Francklin: *op. cit.*, pp. 239-40. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

[3] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 77-8. [4] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 97.

[5] *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission *XI*, p. 185.

[6] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 289. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 457-58.

[7] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 281. Raynal writes about the printed calicoes of Ahmedabad that they were very fine, bright and durable like those of the Coromandal coast. They were worn in Persia, Turkey and Europe and "the rich people of Java, Sumatra, and Molucca islands make pagnos and coverlets of these chintzes. "Raynal *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 45.

[8] *Ibid.*

The plain linen woven on the island of Nagur were highly valued in foreign markets, and the printed calicoes of the districts of Masulipatam, "called Palampores", were inimitable. In these regions watered by the Godavari and Krishna, cotton industry had attained to perfection. James Grant wrote about it in 1786 as follows:

> "The coarser plain cloths made to the north and south of Godavari . . . are equally articles in vast demand abroad, or for interior consumption. But the muslins of Chicacole, the beautiful woollen carpets of Ellore, and silks of Burrampore, in Jehapoor, wrought from raw materials imported from Bengal or China, are rather objects of curiosity."[1]

The towns of Masulipatam and Vizagapatam were great cotton manufacturing districts.[2] Further south, in the interior, we learn that cotton industry was a premier industry of the country and was carried to like perfection. The city of Burhanpur was famous for its chintzes which were held in high esteem at the city of Poona—"a chintz turban, seyla and jamah of the best fabric will cost upwards of a thousand rupees".[3] Towns like Tuticorin, Negapatam, Tanjore, Bangalore, etc., were great manufacturing centres of muslins, chintzes, striped and unstriped coarse cloths.[4] About Bangalore, Buchanan writes that its weavers were "a very ingenious class of men" patronized formerly by the Muslim Government. In the times of Hyder Ali, Bangalore was a great manufacturing district of South India.[5] These accounts are sufficient to establish that throughout the 18th century, the textiles were the grand national industry, and were manufactured in almost every part of the country.

## *Silk and Woollen Manufactures*

The silk and woollen manufactures could not be so popular as the cotton ones, but India produced them in sufficient quan-

[1] *Fifth Report*, ed. by Firminger, *III*, p. 8.
[2] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 86, 88, 90. Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 335.
[3] *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission *XI*, p. 186.
[4] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 363-65. Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 21-2, 83-5.
[5] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 221-22. About cotton manufactures of south India he says that each kind of cloth had several patterns and each pattern was of various degrees of fineness. *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 217.

tities to meet the requirements of internal consumption. The silk manufactures of Bengal in particular were also exported to markets in Asia and Europe. We find that mixed silk cotton fabrics, besides calicoes, linens, mulmuls, tanjebs, chintzes, ginghams, pure silk and woollen fabrics, turbans and shawls are mentioned as prominent items of export from Bengal and other parts.[1] Besides Dacca, the district of Malda manufactured good silk stuffs.[2] Cossimbazar is mentioned as the general market of Bengal silk and its silk manufactures were in circulation throughout Asia. Of its "unwrought silk, 300,000, or 400,000 lbs weight" was exported outside for European manufactures.[3] Of the country about Cossimbazar, Grose remarks that it was very fertile, its inhabitants were "remarkably industrious, being employed in many useful manufactures. They generally furnish 22,000 bales of silk a year, each bale weighing 100 lbs".[4] Balasore, Radhanagar, Nadia, Murshidabad in Bengal are mentioned as important centres of silk manufactures.[5] Gujarat is also mentioned as equally famous for its silk manufactures. This industry declined later and Malet wrote about it in 1788: "I am informed that several families of Gujarat silk manufacturers, Soucars and others, distressed by oppressions of the farmers of this State (Maratha) who rule that province, have fled to and settled at Banaras where they practise their former occupation."[6] Aurangabad was famous for the manufacture of mixed silk and cotton brocaded cloths, and Malet writes:

> "Great quantities of Bengal raw silk were formerly manufactured in this city and brought in by the way of Benares and Bombay. The quantity is now greatly fallen off."[7]

Of the woollen fabrics, Kashmir was almost the sole manufacturing region, feeding other parts of the country. It imported wool from Tibet and after bleaching it, manufactured finished

[1] Holwell: *op. cit.*, pp. 194-204. Taylor: *op. cit.*, pp. 4-8, 11-12, 42. Milburn: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 289, 292; *II*, 221. Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *II*, Chapter *II*. Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, pp. 107-09.

[2] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 46.

[3] Rennell: *Memoir of the Map of Indostan*, p. 61. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 472-73.

[4] Grose: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 240.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 236. Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 496-98. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 519. Holwell: *op. cit.*, pp. 201-02, Part *I*.

[6] *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission *XI*, p. 185.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

articles. Its shawls whose beauty was "considerably enhanced by the introduction of flower work" were in great demand in the country.[1]

In Bengal, in the first half of the 18th century, we find that jute was also produced for local consumption and hand-woven jute was a subsidiary industry. In Ghoraghat, North Bengal, sack-cloth was produced, and the East India Company frequently exported gunnies. Bengal's trade in gunny-bags "continued to develop right up to the middle of the nineteenth century."[2]

## *Sugar, Tobacco, Saltpetre, Indigo, Opium, etc.*

Sugar, a popular item of dietary, was manufactured on a large scale. In the period before 1756, Bengal used to export about 50,000 maunds yielding a profit of about 50 per cent in specie. During the period of twenty years (1756-76) "there flowed into Bengal for this article no less than 60,000,000 rupees." This industry declined later and Bengal had to import it from Varanasi and China. England's interest in encouraging the sugar industry in West Indian Islands, and imposition of heavy duties crippled this productive industry in Bengal.[3] The manufacture of sugar from cane was a simple economical process widely practised in the country.[4] The manufacture of tobacco was likewise universal, and the plant was cultivated in every part of the country. It is said that the plant was introduced by Jehangir.[5] Salt was also prepared in many cities in India; Bihar was very rich in saltpetre deposits. The district of Chhapra is mentioned as abounding in saltpetre and the French and the Dutch had factories there for its manufacture. It formed a considerable branch of the Company's exports from Bihar as it was used in the manufacture of gun-powder.[6] Saltpetre was also manufac-

[1] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 292. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 45.
Forster writes that these shawls were of three sizes—"two of which, the long and the small square one", were in common use in India—"the other, long and very narrow, with a large mixture of black colour in it", was worn as a girdle "by the Northern Asiatics." Forster: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 19.

[2] Sinha: *Economic Annals of Bengal*, p. 37.

[3] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 270. [4] *Ibid.* [5] Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, p. 75.

[6] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 26-7. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 478-79. Milburn: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 238-39.

tured in the Northern Circars in large quantities, and in Mysore its manufacture under Sultan Tipu was conducted under state patronage.[1] Manufacture of indigo had been practised in India from very early period, and during the 18th century we find it manufactured in large quantities in Bihar province, western districts of Uttar Pradesh, and in Northern Circars. European enterprise in indigo plantation was slowly progressing in the period.[2] According to Abbe de Guyon, the best indigo in the world used to be manufactured in a village near Ahmedabad.[3] Opium was most conveniently manufactured in Bihar. Stavorinus informs us that more than one hundred thousand pounds in weight was annually exported by the Dutch Company for consumption in Java, Moluccas, and other eastern parts of Asia.[4] Later on, trade in this article was banned to other nations as the East India Company held a monopoly of the produce of this drug.[5] A great quantity of "poppies" was collected in districts around Patna, and opium of excellent quality was produced. Patna owed its prosperity primarily to its extensive commerce in opium and saltpetre.[6]

Besides these, contemporary accounts bear out that other miscellaneous articles of local consumption like oils, wines, liquors, perfumes, drugs, lac, gum, spices, etc., were produced in abundance. A kind of wine produced of grapes in Kashmir is mentioned as resembling Madeira, the sweet wine prized by the Europeans. People of all classes indulged in this luxury in that country.[7] For spices the coastal regions of the South were famous far and wide. The pepper of Malabar was "esteemed the best of all that is produced in Asia", and was keenly "sought after by all nations". Its areca-nut was conveyed by land to all parts of the Deccan, and by sea to coasts of Coromandal and Bengal. Its cinnamon, about "one million pounds", was annually exported to the Red Sea, Gulf of Persia and Europe. Of pepper, "no less than ten full cargoes (which may amount to between eight and

[1] Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 234, 238. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 316.

[2] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 287-88. Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 241, 319-20. Macpherson: *European Commerce with India*, pp. 200-01.

[3] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 283-84.

[4] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 474-75.

[5] Colebrooke: *op. cit.*, pp. 71-2.

[6] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 24-5.

[7] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 19.

nine millions of pounds weight)" were annually exported to the different parts of India.[1]

In contemporary Indian writings we also come across manufacture of ice and paper. The *Zemindars* of Sirmor sent ice on boats by the river to the Princes of the country, their ministers and nobles, and common people nicknamed the ruler of that country (Kumayun) as Ice-king.[2] The hills of Rajmahal in Bengal supplied the "natural ice", and people also manufactured artificial ice with boiled water exposed to cold weather in nights and stored it in ground pits well protected from wind and heat.[3] The manufacture of paper, too, was known and in Bihar, it is reported "the best paper" was manufactured.[4] It was also manufactured in Kashmir and Forster writes:

> "The Kashmerians fabricate the best writing paper of the east, which was formerly an article of extensive traffic; as were its lacquer ware, cutlery and sugars; and the quality of these manufactures clearly evince that where the inhabitants governed by wise and liberal princes, there are few attainments of art which they would not acquire."[5]

## *Metallic and Allied Industries*

We have already referred to the superior skill and workmanship of silversmiths, blacksmiths and other mechanics whose members mostly confined themselves to one sort of work.[6] In India, extraction of metals and their utilization in manufacture of different articles, too, was practised widely. It is, however, true that the processes of extracting mineral wealth of the country were rude and entailed plenty of labour. In Northern India we find that at Mongher in Bihar, and Birbhum in Bengal, extraction of iron was a popular industry. Twining writes that the iron ores at the former place were "more precious than gold to the industrious inhabitants . . . sustaining by its abundant and cheap supplies an extensive manufactory of iron utensils of almost every description". He writes:

[1] Stavorinus: *op. cit., III*, pp. 220-21.
[2] *Araish-i-Mahfil*. pp. 58-9.
[3] *Seir-Mutaqherin, II*, p. 158, footnote.
[4] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 82.
[5] Forster: *op. cit., II*, p. 19.
[6] Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 52-3. Craufurd: *op. cit., II*, pp. 98-9.

"A traveller from Europe is surprised to see presented to him for sale in the interior of India, knives and forks, saucepans, grid irons and tea-kettles, which would not discredit an iron monger's shop in London."

To satisfy the needs of the foreign cantonment population, Mongher manufactured "chairs, tables, sofas, cots, bedsteads, drawers" "extremely neat, and scarcely inferior to the European models after which they are made".[1] Rennell has mentioned several places in Birbhum, in West Bengal, where iron manufactories were working. Forges for iron were wrought at Deocha and Muhammad Bazar. The ore was brought from Mullarpur. Iron mines were wrought near Damra, 16 miles from Suri, and at Kistnagar.[2]

In South India diamonds and pearls were extracted in the Bijapur kingdom.[3] When Buchanan surveyed the East India Company's southern territories in the first decade of the 19th century, he found that manufacture of steel from iron ores was a common industry in Mysore district.[4] The steel wires used for strings in musical instruments, manufactured at Seringapatam, were sent to different parts of the country.[5] According to Heyne, the steel manufactured in Mysore was decidedly the best he had ever seen—though smelting of iron was crude, and steel manufacturers were not acquainted with perfect methods of fusing the metal and forming it into bars.[6] The manufacture of glass of different colours was also undertaken, as it was necessary for manufacture of ear-rings widely used by Indian women.[7] The manufacture of arms is mentioned in contemporary accounts. In the Punjab, these were greatly superior to those of other parts. The daggers and swords from Lahore and Sialkot were of high quality.[8] Patiala manufactured "firearms superior to most parts of Hindustan".[9] The manufacture of European arms like pistols, too, was also undertaken at some

[1] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 127-28.

[2] Rennell: *op. cit.*, pp. 109-11. Muhammad Bazar is a village between Suri and Deocha.

[3] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 301.

[4] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 151, 174-75; *II*, pp. 19, 283-84; *III*, pp, 360-63, 376-79.

[5] *Ibid*, *I*. pp. 151-53.

[6] Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 358-64.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 354-57. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 147-50.

[8] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 131.

[9] Francklin: *op. cit.*, p. 75.

places; the Indian guns, and fire-locks could successfully compete with European "Tower-Proofs".[1] Gun-carriages and gun-powder, too, were manufactured in the country and foreign nations not seldom got them manufactured under their management.[2]

## *Boat and Ship-building Industry*

Ship-building industry of India, which disappeared in the 19th century, requires a special notice. There is unquestionable evidence to the fact that maritime trade of Indian commercial classes was not altogether dependent on foreign navigation. In the middle of the 18th century, John Henry Grose noted that at Surat, Indian ship-building industry was well established. He writes that "they build incomparably the best ships in the world for duration" and of all sizes with a capacity of over a thousand tons. Their design appeared to him "a bit clumsy" but their durability impressed him. They "lasted for a century". He also remarks that as nevigators, Indians were not inferior to Europeans who were, however, more "vigorous" and "patient of fatigue".[3] Raynal also informs us that India-built ships "lasted for ages", and "were mostly of a thousand or twelve hundred tons burthen". The skill of Indian navigators "was sufficient for the seas and the seasons in which they sailed" and Europeans found them very serviceable in their voyages from one part of India to another.[4] Lord Grenville mentions a ship built at Surat, which continued to navigate up to the Red Sea from 1702 when it is first mentioned in Dutch letters as "the old ship" up to the year 1770.[5] He mentions that at the ports of Coringa and Narsapore at the mouth of Godawari, ships of war and merchandise "not exceeding 500 tons" could be built with "facility, convenience, and cheapness".[6] The ship-building industry of Bengal appears to have declined in the early part of the 18th century. Before 1780, we find its maritime trade conducted in ships built at other ports like Surat, Bombay, etc.

[1] *Seir-Mutaqherin*, *II*, p. 9. footnote. Rennell: *op. cit.*, p. 61.
[2] Long: *Selections from Unpublished Records*, pp. 39, 120.
[3] Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 108-110. [4] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 31-2.
[5] *British India Analysed*, *III*, pp. 17-8. [6] *Ibid.*, pp. 662-63.

The acute shortage of timber in England, and "the extraordinary need for feeding British troops on the coast of Coromandal" in the famine of 1780 in Carnatic, forced the East India Company to revive the industry in Bengal. We find that during 1781-1802, Calcutta built ships and vessels on the river Hugli providing for a tota tonnage of 24,580. At other places, 18 ships and 54 small vessels were built during the period.[1] In this province, private European traders, mostly English servants of the Company, "built considerable number of ships" from their own capital. They hoped that the Act of 1794 would legalize trade in them with Europe, but were sadly disappointed. They could not sail beyond the Cape, unless licensed by the East India Company which possessed a monopoly of trade to Europe. Lord Wellesley licensed some of these to sail for London but many privately owned ships remained unused. In his despatch of 30th September, 1800, he pressed the Directors to admit India-built ships in European seas and relieve the British traders in the Company's dominions. He even recommended the use of British capital to promote this profitable industry of India. The President of the Board, Dundas, supported him but the Court turned down these proposals. The Court feared that encouragement to the Indian industry would result in the decline of English shipping and cause suffering to English seamen. The inevitable consequence of such a preferential policy was the total decline of India's flourishing shipping industry in the later period.[2]

Bombay is mentioned as a famous centre of this industry. The Parsees were great builders of ships—highly skilled as "naval architects". The superiority of Bombay timber, the excellence of its docks made the place of first importance in the British Empire of India.[3]

The construction of boats of different shapes and sizes, for inland and coastal traffic, for fishing purposes on the coasts, was a well-established popular industry. The rich men are mentioned as owning boats for their travelling and recreational purposes, and these were very "expensive owing to the beautiful decorations of painted and gilt ornaments", "highly varnished" exhibiting "a considerable degree of taste". The boats

[1] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 174-75.

[2] Macpherson: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 231-36.

[3] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 171-72.

utilized for coastal traffic are mentioned as light, pliant, and quick in movement.[1]

## *Industrial Arts*

The industrial arts connected with the various industries, too, were highly advanced and have been referred to in contemporary accounts. Abbe de Guyon remarkes that artists manufacturing cabinets, chests, and other articles in which "gold, silver, mother of pearl, ebony and ivory" were highly skilled. Smiths working in gold and silver are mentioned as cutting diamonds and setting them "with a skill and address which are admirable".[2] The arts of embroidery, jewellery, cloth-printing and dyeing were practised almost everywhere to great perfection. The art of sculptor, engraving on stones, and making valuable ornaments from stones was also highly developed at various places.[3] In Northern India, we learn that the artists of Agra were very skilled in their trades, especially gold lace makers; "the gold and silver lace made there is very costly and fine, and for this reason most merchants buy good lace-work and embroidered cloths there and taking them to various countries, sell them at great profit".[4] At Patna, the manufactures of silver, iron and wood are praised for their high technical perfection.[5] The city of Dacca supplied "the best and finest Indian embroideries in gold, silver, or silk, and those embroidered neck cloths, and fine muslins, which are seen in France".[6] We have referred to the printed calicoes, and painted coloured cotton cloths of the Krishna region, where dyeing cloths with "chayroot" "the madder of the East", was a perfect art.[7] Heyne has given an elaborate account of the dyeing processes on the Coromandal coast, "exceedingly tedious and complicated", and says that "they are utterly unable to explain the rationale of their processes". He, however, admits that the beauty of their colours cannot fail to be admired and "that a knowledge of their

[1] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 464-68 Also p. 468, footnote, *British India Analysed*, *III*, pp. 660-61. Hodges: *op. cit.*, pp. 38-40. Rennell: *op. cit.*, pp. 14, 68. Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 52-3.

[2] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 286-87.

[3] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, pp. 82, 112.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[5] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 24-5.

[6] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 277.

[7] *Fifth Report on India Affairs*, *III*, p. 8.

methods might improve the processes of the European dyers, and might enable them to make some advantageous changes in the art as at present practised."[1] We have no reason to differ from Raynal that in India, the handicrafts and allied arts of painting, embroidery, etc., had reached a high stage of perfection and further improvements were not possible during the revolutions and anarchy which prevailed in the 18th century.[2]

## *General Factors of Economic Life*

Despite its vastness and uneven configuration, India had become a compact economic unit in the 18th century. The development of markets, internal communications, banking and internal trade had brought its different parts into intimate contact. The isolation of villages so much spoken of also does not appear to be a marked feature of the economic life of the period. The merchant had succeeded in forging intimate links between towns and villages, and no part of the country, however primitive and backward, was, strictly speaking, isolated. We shall briefly review the state of these general influences on the country's economic life. In this connection we should, however, bear in mind the shortcomings of the age, its negligible resources of modern technical and engineering skill, promoting rapid communications, and its distracted political conditions thwarting possibilities of further developments.

In a country where travelling is not secure and comfortable, where movement of stores from one place to another is not swift and smooth, society cannot make full use of its industrial resources. But India of the 18th century could legitimately pride itself on the facilities it afforded to the travellers. Its towns and countryside were covered by rest-houses, *Choultrees* and *Serais*, erected by governments or philanthropists which were looked after by the public servants. Here the travellers were served with necessary provisions at nominal rates; all were admitted to the privilege of staying. At many places, the rest-houses were far larger in number than were necessary for the convenience of visitors and travellers.[3] The author of *Araish-i-Mahfil* has dwelt

[1] Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 204-17. [2] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 454-55.

[3] Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 67-68. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 476-77. Hodges: *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 32. Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 2, 10-11; *II*, p. 185; *III*, p. 465.

*on these conveniences that in every city and town there were "innumerable handsome and elegant resting places, built of* masonry, where travellers in all seasons may obtain coverings to put over them, bedding to lie on, and various kinds of delicacies to eat". In most of the villages, there were mosques, monasteries, schools and gardens, and "a number of houses for the poor and indigent and travellers". "There are merchants' houses in every place," he writes, "and travellers eat, drink, rise, sit down, and travel the whole day in ease and comfort, and in the evening, at the end of the day's journey, obtain a variety of comforts". In poetic strain he concludes:[1]

*Wherever you look, everything is at ease.*
*A journey here is no journey: it is like a walk in a garden.*

His account, which is certainly more true of the country under settled conditions, is corroborated by the testimony of the foreigners who speak of public buildings for the reception of travellers in towns and villages "erected and endowed by the munificence of the prince, the generosity of some rich individual, or, not uncommonly in consequence of some pious view".[2] Dubois says that in every South Indian village there were large and convenient rest-houses serving two-fold purpose as shelters to travellers and as council chambers, "where the headmen assemble to consider the public affairs of the village, settle law-suits, put an end to quarrels and pacify disputants". These public buildings were also utilized for celebrations of religious rites where there were no temples. They have been described as a shed or long room open on one side.[3] In Hyderabad State, Heyne observed that mosques superintended by *Fakirs* were generally used as places of rest by travellers and these were "much cleaner than other choultrees."[4] In his letters on India, Forster has made interesting remarks on the pleasantness of travelling. According to him, the construction of public works, "register of fame", for ostentation, self-love, vanity or whatever reason, had "powerful sway over the minds of people."[5] He observes:

"India—you know, hath ever been famed for affording convenient places of accommodation to the traveller, who at the

[1] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 9. [2] Craufurd: *op. cit.*. p. 93. [3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, p. 327.
[4] Heyne: *op. cit.*, p. 303. [5] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 79.

distance of eight and ten miles, seldom fails meeting with a public lodging or a reservoir of water, where he may perform his ablutions and quench his thirst."

In Northern India, he says, the economy of caravansarai was conducted by wise regulations. The keepers of the *Sarai* supplied bed, smoking pipe, utensils, repast, etc.—all at very low rates.[1] At shops in the towns could be had "excellent cooked food" for "wholesome meals,"[2] and the sweetmeat shops, which were very popular, were the coffee houses of the country. He writes of these:

"What harmony, what good humour, are often seen circulating in a sweetmeat shop, the coffee-house of India! Where all subjects, except that of the ladies, are treated with freedom: not so frequently perhaps, nor with such a refinement of language, as among the politicians of an European capital, yet with equal fervour and strength of voice. The favourite topic is war."[3]

Besides these facilities, the means of transport too were not such as to render travelling wholly unpleasant and tedious. Insecurity had not assumed a wild character while travelling, or transferring stores till the end of the 18th century. Scrafton says that robberies were unusual on the highways—"that I doubt there having been an instance of one in the memory of man. The diamond merchants, who generally pass this country (Bengal), have seldom even a weapon of defence, owing to that admirable regulation which obliges the lord of the spot where the robbery is committed, to recover the effects, or make good the value."[4] This he wrote about the middle of the century when the Mughal administration was fairly well on the path of decline in Northern India. The conditions did not deteriorate violently within next two or three decades, in spite of the worsening of internal political conditions. Forster, who wrote after 1780, also speaks of the security on the roadside from Varanasi to Moradabad:

"Travelling is by no means attended with danger on this part of India, as may be proved by my example; for in no part of the roads from Benares to this place, though chiefly alone, did

[1] Foster; *op. cit.*, pp. 73-4. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 205.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 242. [4] Scrafton: *op. cit.*, p. 13.

I meet with impediments or ill usage: and I shall hold myself guilty of an injustice, did I not unreservedly declare that the inhabitants treated me with civility and, usually with kindness."[1]

The carts driven by oxen were the most popular mode of transport in the country, and the four-wheeled carriages are mentioned as conveyance befitting even the ranks of ministers and nobles. They were furnished with covers "richly embroidered" and in the hot weather, with covers of "Khus-Khus". These chariots of the higher classes were very comfortable for travelling and were "clean and glittering like a picture on the wall". For their women, palanquins were the most popular conveyance[2] We learn that a chariot drawn by an excellent pair of oxen could easily "make thirty or forty koses a day." It was in this conveyance that Siraj left Murshidabad after his defeat at Plassey, with his beloved Lutf-un-Nisa and her mother.[3] Of "Asiatic equipage", horses and elephants were other popular modes, and boats were very convenient for travel and transport through rivers. The large boats for long distances and pleasure excursions were equipped with spacious rooms, providing plenty of accommodation.[4]

Road and water communications of the country were sufficiently developed to meet the requirements of internal traffic and trade. In this respect the great rivers of Northern India were an asset of inestimable value in the economic life of the people. There is no doubt that economic intercourse between towns and villages was greatly facilitated by rivers and streams of the country. In Bengal, the economic conveniences of people were mostly derived from its rivers which intersected the whole province like "numerous canals" and facilitated speedy transport of mercantile goods. At a very moderate charge, "the products of districts, towns and villages" were carried to different places for consumption or export to distant marts.[5] Alexander Dow writes: "The easy communication by water from

[1] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 189.

[2] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, pp. 30-1. [3] *Seir-Mutaqherin*. *II*, p. 94.

[4] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 53-4, 83, 85. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 464-68; *III*, pp. 16-7. Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *II*, 180-81, 419-20.

[5] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 12. Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I* p. 276.

place to place facilitates a mercantile intercourse among the inhabitants. Every village has its canals, every Perganah its river and the whole kingdom the Ganges, which, falling by various mouths into the Bay of Bengal, lay open the ocean for the export of the commodities and manufactures."[1] With slight modification, the statement applies to all other parts navigated by large rivers. These communications were an essential basis of the extensive internal trade of the country during the period, which contributed in large measure to the prosperity of Indian towns, their efficient systems of markets and financial organization.

"The varied and extensive commerce which exists in Indostan, both by sea and land, is more than can be imagined by those who are unacquainted with the multiplicity and value of the productions of this wealthy empire", observes Robert Orme, "the highroads are full of caravans; the navigable rivers of boats; the sea-coasts of barques; and ships with the richest cargoes make voyages from one part of the kingdom to another."[2] India retained much of this vigour of its commercial life in the later part of the 18th century also, though the fall of the Mughal Empire and the rise of independent States and their oppressive duties were not the influences under which internal commerce could prosper.[3] This trade in commodities which were produced and sold in the country was entirely controlled by Indian capital and poor manufacturing classes also shared the profits.[4] Indian merchants of big cities had their agencies established in different parts of the country to make transactions wholesale.[5] In Kashmir we find commercial agents of most of the important cities of Northern India and also those of "Tartary, Persia and Turkey", and a great number of merchants investing their fortunes in trade and enjoying "the pleasures of a fine climate".[6] The merchants of Kashmir, trading in the products of Tibet and India, had their agencies established as far as Bengal.[7] Innumerable caravans, equipped with tents, oxen and mules, were constantly on the move shifting stores from one part to another.

[1] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. LXII. [2] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 442.

[3] Dow: *op. cit.*, *I*. p. LXXX.

[4] Vansittart: *A Narrative of the Transactions in Bengal*, *II*, p. 347. Bolts: *op. cit.*, p. 197. Holwell: *op. cit.*, *I*. p. 196,

[5] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 198-99. [6] Forster: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 20.

[7] *Indian Hist., Quarterly*—June 1933, See the article on "Trade of Tibet."

Merchants of big cities appointed their agents to accompany them and deliver the goods at distant marts.[1] The traders from Kabul and beyond are also mentioned as visiting the country in caravans "generally once a year" "bringing with them fruits, horses and shawls from Cashmir," and taking back the country's manufactures.[2] Till the establishment of the Company's political influence in Bengal, "inconceivable numbers of merchants from all parts of Asia in general as well as from the rest of Hindustan in particular, sometimes in bodies of many thousands at a time, used annually to resort to Bengal with little else than ready money or bills to purchase the produce of these provinces".[3] The merchants from Bengal would visit the different parts of Northern India and Assam, and also Cutch, Malabar, and the coast of Coromandal.[4] There were many classes in the country which worked as mobile traders, transporting grains, salts and other commodities from one part to another. Among these mention may be made of Lombardis in South India and Banjaras and Lodahs in North India. They are described as stout people, travelling in large parties "with drivers of many thousand herd of cattle". In the mountainous parts of the Peninsula, where the condition of roads was not good, the Lombardis were "the sole carriers of Indian merchandise". They did not let people feel "the want of rivers, and of wheel carriages," and kept the circulation of goods throughout the Peninsula. They traded mostly in grains and salt, and popular European articles such as knives, looking glasses, etc.[5] The Banjaras and Lodahs of Central and Northern India have been praised for their honesty, industry and good memory, and people entrusted with them even large cash for payments at other places.[6]

[1] Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 191, 195.
[2] Franeklin: *op. cit.*, pp. 207-08.
[3] Bolts: *op. cit.*, p. 21, also p. 200.
[4] Datta: *op. cit.*, p. 267.
[5] Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 22, 82-3. Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 66-80. Heyne states that they were left unmolested in times of war and were subject to a trifling tax. *Ibid.*, pp. 82-3.
[6] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 152-53. Broughton: *op. cit.*, pp. 41-2. Craufurd: *op. cit.*, p. 326.
These inland carriers traversed even the mountainous and interior regions inhabited by primitive tribes. In Central India, we find Gosains trading with their cattle in silk, cotton, foodstuffs, spices, oils, butter, starch,
(*Continued*)

## *Internal Trade*

The volume of inland trade carried through these modes suffered due to political conditions but was still considerable. The industrial produce of Bengal under the Nawabs stole into remotest parts of India. The low price at which its salt could be conveyed "through all the branches of the Ganges" made it a very profitable article of trade with different parts of the country. Alexander Dow writes: "Great quantities were sent to Vanarasi and Mirzapur from the markets of which the province of Oudh and Allahabad, the territories of the Raja of Bundela and of all the petty princes of the kingdom of Malwa, were supplied."[1] Of the inland trade between Gujarat and Bengal before the first Maratha war Malet informs us:

"It is a very curious circumstance in commercial intercourse that these two richest provinces of Hindustan, I mean, Gujarat and Bengal, used regularly to exchange their respective commodities of silk and cotton; the former, the produce of Bengal, was manufactured in the highest perfection at and distributed all over the Eastern World from Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat; the latter, the growth of Gujarat, was distributed in a still greater degree of delicacy and perfection from the looms of Bengal. These, with spices, were the articles by which the specie of the West has from time immemorial been drawn to the East."[2] He also gives us a general view of the internal commerce of the Maratha countries. Tin, pepper, dry coconuts, betel-nuts, spices, quick-silver, lead, saffron, asafoetida, vermilion, copper, wax-candles, broad cloth, raw silk and muskets were the principal articles which used to come from Goa to Poona by means of bullocks or boats. Piece-goods, white and coloured and plain cotton mixed with silk used to come from Narronpoynt (North of the Krishna river) to Poona by means of bullocks, chintzes and white cloths used to come from Burhanpur (on the Tapti

sugar, metals, gum-lac, resin, wax, honey, etc., with regions occupied by Gond chiefs. (See *Asiatic Annual Register—1806*, Miscellaneous Tracts, pp. 21-2, 34). These Gosains were also the chief agency of commerce between Nepal and Northern India, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal. They have been described by the different Europeans who visited Tibet before the end of the 18th century. See *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission, *XIII*, pp. 102-03.

[1] Datta: *op. cit.*, p. 268.

[2] *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission, *XI*, p. 184.

river) to Poona by means of bullocks and ponies. *Seylas*, turbans, *Saris*, white and coloured, plain and mixed, used to come from Peytun to Poona by means of bullocks, and mixed and cotton brocaded cloths used to come from Aurangabad (in Andhra Pradesh) to Poona by means of the same conveyance. White cotton piece-goods used to come from Saugor to Poona. Varanasi and Bengal cotton and silk piece-goods used to come from Mirzapur (on the Ganga) to Nagpur. Nagpur used to trade with Omrahpur in Varanasi and Bengal cotton and silk piece-goods and *vice versa*.[1]

There were regular commercial contacts between Bengal and distant provinces of the Punjab and Kashmir in the North, and the Western Coast as far as Malabar. The central parts of India, likewise were connected with each other and other parts lying at the extremities. The different regions of South India were not only having brisk trade amongst themselves, but also with distant parts of Northern India. It would be a tedious task to catalogue endless variety of goods. The contemporary accounts clearly demonstrate the vitality of India's inland trade during the 18th century, which contributed mainly to the concentration of merchants and bankers of all grades in the towns.[2] Of a little town, like Wallajanagar, of about 300 houses in Carnatic, Heyne says: "Every article that India furnished can be procured here, and even money transactions are carried to a great extent."[3]

Many of India's towns, which were great centres of trade, contained populations of more than a lac. In Northern India, Patna, the "convenient emporium and mart of the productions of that rich province", commanding a flourishing commerce on the Ganga, "contained more than 300,000 inhabitants.[4] Mirzapur (in Uttar Pradesh), mentioned "in commercial importance as a rival of Patna", chief emporium of cotton, had a population of of about 200,000 inhabitants.[5] Owla, Bareilly, Pilibhit and Rampur were "first-rate cities", "emporiums of commerce between the mountainous tracts and the plains" and imported borax, pith, drugs, wax, honey, etc. Rampur contained a population of

[1] *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission *XI*, p. 185-86.
[2] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 76-9. Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 198-99, 440; *II*, p 79.
[3] Heyne: *op. cit.* p. 22. [4] Twining: *op. cit.*, p. 135. [5] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

about one lac.[1] In 1765, Rennell wrote of Bengal as "the kingdom of very large cities".[2] In South India, Poona, the capital of the Peshwas, was also a flourishing commercial town of about 110,000 inhabitants.[3] Surat, a centre of foreign and internal commerce, contained a population estimated at 4 lacs, and Ahmedabad, in Gujarat, was as large as Surat but not so populated.[4] These centres of industry and internal trade were, however, gradually declining in the period.

## *Market and Banking Developments*

From contemporary accounts, it is not difficult to acquire an idea of the high state of marketing of goods, and banking arrangements. The towns of India were noted for their crowded market places, with shops of brokers, merchants, bankers, jewellers, etc., arranged in glittering array. Of Delhi, we learn that though the city declined in prosperity, yet its Chandni Chowk remained "a great market place," "the light of the whole city". The shop of one cloth merchant there is mentioned as "equal to that of all the cloth merchants of Constantinople, and the banking house of one banker is equal to that of all the bankers of Iran".[5] In the markets of big towns could be had almost everything in abundance. Here is a description of the central market of Varanasi, the city of Brahmans as fat and as idle in appearance as the bulls:

> "Bajars full of shops of various sorts of grain, cloths, brass vessels, oil, ghee, heaps of cowries from the Maldiv Islands, trinkets and ornaments in great variety, of gold and silver, others of brass for the ears, noses, wrists, and anklets of the women."[6]

In big industrial towns, specialized markets were a usual

[1] Francklin: *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9, 240.

[2] Unpublished letter of Rennell: *Bengal Past and Present, 1933, 46*, p. 28. Clive described the city of Murshidabad "as extensive, populous and rich, as the city of London, with this difference that there are individuals in the first possessing infinitely greater property than any of the last city." Hill: *op. cit., III*, p. 314.

[3] Elphinstone: *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[4] Milburn: *op. cit., I*, pp. 157, 160; also pp. 134, 154.

[5] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, pp. 53-4. Also Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 241-42, 250.

[6] Twining: *op. cit.*, pp. 329-30.

feature. At Surat, they have been described for example, "the bazar for cottons, for exchange, for greens, for wood, and several others, which overflow with people towards the evening, especially the first named, which is the place where the Baniyans and other Asiatic merchants meet, as those of Europe do upon their exchanges. A great number of retail shops are equally found here".[1] At Chinsura, in West Bengal, we learn that the money market, "the bazar of the money changers, which is a long and broad street, is the handsomest."[2] In other big towns, markets were a prominent feature of town life and supported a large population of shop-keepers of all types.[3] Here is a description of the market in the city of Burdwan, from a contemporary Bengali author, Ramaprasada:

> "Beyond these the poet saw the king's market with thousands of foreign merchants sitting there. There were hundreds of traders and shop-keepers and countless gems, pearls, and rubies. There were various kinds of fine and beautiful cloths such as Vanat (felt cloth), makhmala (velvet), pattu, bhunai, bata-dara, dacaia, maldai (cloths named after various localities), and various other kinds, much liked by the Amirs. There were many bilati (foreign) articles of fancy price or of fashionable designs, which were, however, heaped together for want of customers."[4]

In those regions where the marketing of goods was not highly developed, or towns which were not in the ordinary reach of the rural population, we find in existence a system of weekly fairs called *Shanday* in South India or *Haat* or *Gana* in Bengal. They promoted intimate economic contacts between rural and urban areas, and fed the villages with provisions of all kinds which they required. At these fairs the farmers also disposed of their produce to merchants of other places. Business was conducted on modern lines of sale and purchase through money.[5] The religious fairs at centres of pilgrimage are also mentioned occasions for great marts.[6] About the religious fair at Tripetty, Malet makes the following observation:

[1] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 478. [2] *Ibid.*, *I*, p. 513.
[3] Ali: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 36-7. [4] Datta: *op. cit.*, pp. 454-55.
[5] Buchanan: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 39-40, 125; *II*, pp. 226, 459-60. Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 108. [6] Bacon: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 174.

"... that formerly there was a great mart for the horses of the Deccan and the camels of Marwar at the great annual Jattra of Tripetty (a town and hill temple in Madras) ... great quantities of the brocade and silk goods of Aurangabad and Gujarat, with other piece-goods, used to go with the caravans from the Deccan, whence were brought in exchange several articles of the fabric of the lower Carnatic."[1]

Indian enterprise in banking, too, was not less advanced. We find the Europeans often borrowing money from Indian capitalists, and in contemporary accounts there are references to big banking houses financing industrial enterprises. From the author of *Araish-i-Mahfil* we have a clear idea of the range of banking enterprise in the country:

"Moreover, the bankers are so upright that if any person places a thousand rupees, secretly, with one of them by way of deposit without any witness, then should he ask it again at any time, he immediately makes it over to him without any demur or ceremony; and if anyone, by reason of fear of the road or any other cause, should deliver money into his charge, on the condition that he will take it to a certain city, or that his children are there, and that he wishes it conveyed to them, then also, for a little profit, he takes the money, and on a small piece of paper writes a cheque in the Hindi character on the name of his agent, whose shop is in that country, and neither puts it in an envelope nor seals it; then when that person goes to him, he (agent) with much politeness, agreeably to the sum mentioned in the writing, without delay hands over the money to him. . .this kind of writing is called a cheque on demand, and the profit, the draft fee; and if that person wishes it to be sent in anyone else's name, that banker sends that paper with a letter to his agent, and gets his receipt from him, however far the road may be; this kind of writing is simply called a draft. More wonderful still is this that if the holder of that draft at sight should sell that piece of paper to any other banker of any other city than the place mentioned, he will take it at once, and hand over the money to him; and there is another circumstance more wonderful than this—even

[1] *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission, *XI*, p. 188.

if any merchant from fear of the road should deliver over his goods and chattels to a banker, then these good-dispositioned ones take their commission, and convey the goods in perfect safety and security to where the owner directs, taking the loss on themselves; the name of this kind of proceeding is called insurance."[1]

These transactions in money clearly establish that principles of credit were fully understood and practised at a high level of integrity in the country. Money-lending brought into prominence many banking houses in the 18th century. We have already referred to the eminence of the banking house of Jagat Seth in Bengal, who could issue *Darsani Hundees* even to the amount of one crore.[2] In 1749, when the English factory of Cossimbazar was blocaded under the orders of the Nawab, they paid him twelve lacs on behalf of the English.[3] In 1759, we find that for their services to the cause of the English in Bengal they were entertained by the English Governor at Calcutta at a cost of Rs. 17,374.[4] It is probably to these Seths—"Cheyks"—that Raynal refers as "possessed of great power" and living "on the banks of the Ganges." He writes:

> "Their riches have long ago procured them the management of the bank belonging to the Court, the farming of the public revenue, and the direction of the money, which they coin afresh every year, in order to receive annually the benefit arising from the mint."

They commanded "prodigious capital" which enabled them "to lend the government forty, sixty, or even a hundred millions at a time".[5] With the massacre of the Seths by Kasim, ended the glory of this great banking house of the country. In Western India, we find Arjunji Nathjis as great bankers of Surat, who migrated from Varanasi in the beginning of the 18th century. In the middle of the century, they were the bankers and agents of the English Company at the Delhi Court, and their "rupee loans often proved the turning point in the Company's fortunes, when the prospects of raising money elsewhere seemed quite remote". For financing Lord Lake's campaigns in the North,

[1] *Araish-i-Mahfil*, p. 42. [2] *Seir-Mutaqherin*, *I*, p. 93; *II*, pp. 457-58.
[3] Long: *op. cit.*, Extract No. 46
[4] *Ibid.*, No. 425. [5] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 485-86.

they helped the Bombay government with a loan af about 32 lacs of rupees in bullion.[1] At Madras, from very early period, the East India Company utilized the services of Chettis, many of whom worked as Company's contractors and agents with their own capital resources.[2] Malcolm speaks highly of the services rendered by Indian Shroffs.[3] Throughout the period, organized capital resources of India continued to play a significant role in India's economic life as well as foreign commercial and political enterprise. It is only in later accounts dealing with the British territories where no scope was left for banking enterprise in commerce and industry, and capital was diverted into agricultural channels, that we come across the practice of hoarding bullion, particularly with the middleclasses.[4] The capital resources of the country, however, did not vanish with the decline in industries. In the times of William Bentinck, we find a "wealthy native . . . made overtures to Government for the purchase of the Taj Mahal, for the sake of its materials, offering three lakhs of rupees (£ 30,000) for it".[5] According to Henry St. George Tucker, a shrewd financier of Barlow's times, Indian bankers possessed large capital reserves even in the early part of the 19th century. The scope for investment of capital had, however, considerably shrunken.[6]

## *Foreign Trade*

A review of India's foreign trade for the period, despite reactionary influences, shows that the country produced surplus goods in large quantities for export to the outside world. In the commercial economy of the age, India occupied a highly privileged position; the dependence of foreign nations on her exports was amazing, and the returns they made were mostly in bullion and precious metals. Till the end of the 18th century, foreign imports made no impression on the country's internal consumption in which it was entirely self-sufficient. Whatever goods England exported before 1800 were meant for the consumption by the

[1] Douglas: *Bombay and Western India*, pp. 247-68, 466-72.
[2] Love: *Vestiges of Old Madras*, *I*, p. 417.
[3] Malcolm: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 90. [4] Martin: *op.cit.*, *I*, p. 90.
[5] Bacon: *op. cit.*, *II*, pp. 381-82.
[6] Kaye: *Selections from the Papers of Tucker*, p. 403.

European community only, and this state of affairs continued even after 1813, by which time the weaving industries in Bengal and other British territories had received a mortal blow. Commenting on the enquiries in 1813 by a Committee of the House of Lords, Wilson writes:

> "It was stated in evidence that the cotton and silk goods of India up to the period could be sold for a profit in the British Market at a price from 50 per cent to 60 per cent lower than those fabricated in England. It consequently became necessary to protect the latter by duties of 70 per cent and 80 per cent on their value or by positive prohibition. Had this not been the case, had not the prohibitory duties and decrees existed, the mills of Paisley and Manchester would have been stopped in their outset, and could scarcely have been again set in motion, even by the power of steam. They were created by the sacrifice of Indian manufacture."[1]

In 1765, Grose spoke of India as "a bottomless pit for bullions, which can never circulate back to Europe; and when bullion fails that trade must cease". According to him Indians required "nothing but our bullion" for their merchandise.[2] Similar sentiments have been expressed in the 18th century accounts on foreign trade with India. Robert Orme says that the Indian people exported their cloths which they could easily spare and European nations imported bullion and metals which they wanted. The secret of India's extensive commerce was the "multitude of her valuable production" and the "industrious temper of the people".[3] The province of Bengal had the most extensive commerce with the rest of the country and the outside world of Asia and Europe. It supplied them linens and silk, manufactured cloths, sugar, opium, grains, etc. Almost all the European nations made their largest and most valuable investments in Bengal.[4] The returns made were mostly in precious metals and treasures, and Bengal has been spoken of as the sink "where gold and silver disappeared without the least prospect of return".[5] In their letter of September 28, 1767,

[1] Reynolds: *White Sahibs in India*, p. 39.
[2] Grose: *op. cit., I.* pp. 324-25.
[3] Orme: *op. cit.*, p. 414. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 416.
[5] *Ibid.* See also Dow: *op. cit., I*, pp. LXII-LXIV.

the Select Committee wrote to the Court of Directors about Bengal's foreign trade as follows:

"All the European companies formed their investments with money brought into the country; the gulfs (Mocha and Persia) poured in their treasures into the river (Ganges), and across the continent, the inland trade was driven to the westward to the extremity of the kingdom of Guzzerat."[1]

These remarks apply with minor modifications to the rest of the country also, where "spices flowed in by thousand channels". By the middle of the 18th century, India had developed flourishing foreign commerce with almost all the European nations, most of them, like the Dutch, the French, the English and the Danes had large factories and settlements scattered all along the coast and in the interior.[2] After 1737, "prodigious increase of trade" is recorded between France and India,[3] while the Dutch and the English expropriated the lion's share. On the coast of Coromandal and Malabar, the Dutch had the largest share of trade, which exported large quantities of country linens and spices in return for iron, lead, copper, tin, etc.[4] The English after their political successes against the French became supreme on the coast of Coromandal, and in Bengal, after Plassey, their trade "rose like a Phoenix, out of its ashes". They remained prosperous ever since in every part of India.[5]

India's foreign trade with the Asiatic countries, too, was not negligible but it was not so vigorous as in the preceding period. Much of it had passed into the hands of the European companies which got "silver from Europe, China, Japan, Ceylon and traded with India". Still the merchants of Arabia, Felix, Turkey, Persia and Tibet exported Indian goods and mostly paid back in bullion "entirely to the advantage of the Mogul and his subjects". It is mentioned that India required, besides silver, precious metals and horses only, and that under the Mughal government the "export of gold and silver outside the country was forbidden under severe penalties excepting what was

[1] Verelst: *View of Bengal*, Appendix, p. 59.
[2] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 277-86.
[3] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 138. Macpherson: *op. cit.*, p. 275.
[4] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 270-71. Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 114-15, 220-21.
[5] Raynal: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 465-68. Grose: *op. cit.*, *II*, p. 238. Stavorinus: *I*, p. 482.

worked in brocade and other embroidered goods".[1] Of India's exports, fine cotton and silk cloths were the grand items. About 1786, we learn that from Northern Circars alone, the different European nations and foreign adventurers exported fine cotton manufactures amounting to 30 lacs of rupees "of which one half seldom finds its way to England, though a much greater quantity would be productive of a certain benefit, of upwards of 100 per cent".[2] An idea of highly profitable trade of India can be had from the bewildering concourse of foreign merchants at her ancient ports in the first half of the 18th century. In the times of Murshid Quli-Khan, the port of Hugli is mentioned as the centre of Bengal's financial resources, yielding to the government no less than rupees 2,21,275 at the rate of 2½ per cent on value in export and import duties.[3] It was the meeting place of merchants of all nationalities, of England, China, Persia, Turan, Arabia, Ajam, etc., "but the credit of the Mughal merchants was greater than that of merchants belonging to other classes".[4] Masulipatam at the mouth of the Krishna was a very convenient port, drawing merchants from all parts of Europe "to get the painted calicoes, manufactured there, which are more esteemed than any others of the Indies".[5] About 1744, Surat, on the Western Coast, is mentioned as "one of the best, the finest, and richest and greatest marts, not only of the Mogul's country, but of all the Indies". The city was enriched by enormous profits of trade with all the European nations, and was, consequently, the most flourishing place, "the most splendid of all", "of the greatest wealth and trade in all the Indies". "It is here", we learn, "that the Indians constantly embark to go and trade on the coasts of Persia, Arabia, Egypt and Africa, even to the Cape of Good Hope and in the island of Madagascar. Some of them sail to the east, in order to buy nutmegs in the Peninsula of Malacca . . . cloves in the island of Celebes, cinnamon in Ceylon, pearls at Cape Comorin, and musk at Bengal and Cochin China".[6]

Among the European ports in the first half of the 18th century, Bombay alone was competing for supremacy with the old

[1] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.*, *I*. pp. 272-73.
[2] *Fifth Report on India Affairs*, *III*, p. 8.
[3] Sinha: *Economic Annals of Bengal*, p. 7. [4] *Ryaz-us-Salatin*, p. 30.
[5] Abbe de Guyon: *op. cit.* *I*, p. 335. [6] *Ibid.*, *I*, pp. 285-87.

Indian ports. As early as 1754, it is spoken of as "the grand store-house of all the Arabian and Persian commerce".[1] It was the most convenient port for large ships and a "safe retreat in foul weather". In these respects, Surat could not compete with it.[2] As the century progressed, the sea-ports of Calcutta and Madras also developed into emporiums of world commerce demonstrating the growing political and commercial supremacy of England.[3] The gradual ascendancy of these ports was accompanied by the steady decline of India's ancient centres of foreign trada. India, however, retained her unchallenged industrial supremacy in the period, but her prosperity was declining. It will not be out of place to conclude this account with the following remarks of Bolts:

> "Delhi, without the aid of silver or gold mines, was in her times of prosperity a receptacle into which the gold and silver of the greatest parts of the world had been flowing by regular channels for ages .... The great influx of wealth was owing, first, to the extraordinary fruitfulness of the dependent dominions; secondly to the sober industry of the inhabitants, either applied to agriculture, which was greatly encouraged, or to manufacturing those commodities which have for many ages been in esteem throughout the world; and, thirdly, to the strong protection that was granted to merchants."[4]

## *Adverse Influences of the Period*

The internal political disturbances, the oppressions of despotic chiefs, the exactions and harassments of the soldiery in the eighteenth century exercised a ruinous effect on the welfare of the peasantry and industrial classes. Motte, deputed by Clive during the government of Jafar in Bengal to enquire into the conditions under the Maratha government, reports that the province of Orissa wore a deserted appearance. Even the towns like Pipli and Balasore which were once "famous marts" were not prosperous. The mountains abounded with gold and diamonds but people did not work them for fear of the Maratha

[1] Ives: *op. cit.*, p. 31. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.

[3] Milburn: *op. cit.*, *II*, Chapters on Calcutta and Madras.

[4] Bolts: *op. cit.*, p. 21.

chiefs, "to whom their riches would only point them out as a more desirable prey". Owing to the evils inherent in the feudal system of government, the industries had declined and agriculture suffered.[1] On account of the disturbances of the Maratha armies towards the end of 1772, peaceful life of Gujarat was "sadly reversed", and we are informed that "the villages were deserted and destroyed, the harvests reaped by lawless marauders", the public roads were abandoned. The cities were crowded with refugees from the rural areas "promiscuously huddled together in famine and wretchedness of every description". Raghoba's impositions reduced the city of Neriad to great distress and here "the whole tribe of Bhauts, men, women and children, repaired to an open space in the city, armed with daggers, and with a loud voice proclaimed a dreadful sacrifice. They once more prayed for an exemption, which being refused, they rushed furiously upon each other, and a considerable number perished before our (English) astonished troops could disarm them".[2] The Maratha raids caused all-round decay of Ahmedabad, "once so flourishing and delightful", which at the end of the 18th century looked "almost a desert".[3] Contemplating on the melancholy scenes of distress caused by the wars of the period, Forbes writes:

> "Such was the magnificence of former ages: all is now reversed; and it appears as if the courage, magnanimity and generosity, which adorned the character of the Hindoo and Mahomedan prince, had vanished with their fortunes."

National and patriotic sentiments did no longer inspire the conduct of the Indian governments.[4] In almost every part of India, agriculture, industry and internal trade could not thrive or continue at the old scale. The former centres of industry, scared by the storm of political disorder, were declining. Delhi, which manufactured in the 17th century cotton cloths and stuffs of various colours; Lahore and Multan which produced fine white cloths, coloured silk cloths in embroidery, carpets, woollen goods; Agra and Ajmere which were famous for their white cotton, silk cloths, and excellent gold and silver embroidery work on turbans, Varanasi, Ahmedabad, Surat, etc., were

[1] *Asiatic Annual Register for 1799*, Miscellaneous Tracts, pp. 50-6.
[2] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 379. [3] *Ibid.*, *II*, p. 219. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 304.

all dwindling in prosperity. European writers throw vivid light on the economic ruin of Northern India in the later 18th century. Big emporiums of commerce and centres of industry were verging on ruin.[1] Economic life in Southern India, too, was being paralysed by the wars of the period. To the decline of Surat, which, according to Grose, began from 1732[2] (up to this period the Mughal government was sufficiently strong), Stavorinus assigns three causes—the fall of the Mughal nobility, the heavy contributions from merchants by the Maratha government, and its proximity to Bombay which was rising as a centre of export and import trade.[3] The report, dated August 8, 1788, which Charles Warre Malet, the British Resident at Poona, submitted to Lord Cornwallis, throws sufficient light on the dark conditions of the period. According to him, the Mughal government was "magnificent and ostentatious". Towns and cities grew under its patronage. The Indian governments which followed the Mughals failed to provide due encouragement and security to industry and trade. On the contrary, their avarice and oppressions resulted in the "drooping commercial state of all these provinces of Hindustan". In his opinion, welfare of the subjects was no consideration even with the Peshwa administration which was "mean in its genius and grasping in its policy".[4] The contemporary Persian and European accounts are also full of indictments on the Maratha rule which failed to promote the prosperity of society.

The phenomenal political success of the East India Company in the later 18th century, over many fertile tracts further crippled the economic resources of society. Ghulam Hussain bitterly complains that under the British rule in Bengal, the distress of the people and the depopulation of the country went side by side "until they are come to their height, and the desolation is become complete and general".[5] The new rulers were aliens, unfamiliar with the laws and institutions of the country and the customs and manners of its people. Under them corruption and oppression reached their climax and our historian exclaims:

1 Forster: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 98-9, 188, 193. Francklin: *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9, 240.

2 Grose: *op. cit.*, *I*, pp. 104-05. 3 Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, *III*, pp. 116-17.

4 *Proceedings*, Indian Historical Records Commission, *XI*, pp. 181-83.

5 *Seir-Mutaqherin*, *III*, pp. 162-63.

"O God, come to the assistance of your afflicted people, and set open some door through which they may escape from oppression."[1]

It is interesting to study the popular reactions against foreign administration. The people complained that Englishmen carried away princely fortunes from India and not one of them ever thought of helping the people "by sinking a well, digging a pond, planting a public grove, raising a caravanserai, or building a bridge". On the other hand, they clogged the public works of utility with tolls without ever caring to repair them.[2] Under the British rule, the talents and genius of the Indian people were of no use and withered. The old aristocracy was in distress and the country was deprived of its humanity and beneficent care.[3] Englishmen monopolized all the trade of the country and deprived the Indian mercantile classes of their usual means of livelihood.[4] Their oppressions told heavily on the industrial classes who were ultimately forced out of industry.[5] European observers, too, pass similar verdict on the Company's rule. They convince us of the truth of Adam Smith's reflection:

"The Government of an exclusive Company of merchants is perhaps the worst of all governments for any country whatever."

## *Standard and Cost of Living*

In our previous account of food, dress, habitation, etc., we have also tried to illustrate the standards of living of the upper, middle and lower sections of society. A technical discussion of the subject is hardly possible as we do not have statistical information on the incomes of the different classes and the indices of prices at different periods. From whatever accounts are available on the prices of necessities and wages of labour, it can be concluded that in the 18th century the cost of living was abnormally low. Forbes writes that in Gujarat people were seldom distressed for grain, though in many parts of India "the poor eat the seed of the bamboo."[6] He tells us:

"In most parts of Gujerat, a small native family of the low

[1] Stavorinus: *op. cit.*, pp. 171-72. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 183, footnote.
[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 193-94, 198. [4] *Ibid.*, p. 201. [5] *Ibid.* [6] Forbes: *op. cit.*, *I*, p. 467.

castes may live comfortably in their humble cottage for forty and fifty rupees."[1]

According to him, the wants of people in India were few and easily satiable. The same quantity of land could support greater number of people in India than in England.[2] Others have referred to the easy and cheap way of life in the country. In Malabar we learn that provisions were so cheap that "a native inhabitant with his family could subsist with ease upon three farthings per day."[3] At the close of the 18th century, about the cheapness of provisions at Lucknow, Forster writes:

"For two domestics and myself, the horse and his keeper, the whole of our daily expenditure amounted to a sum, which, as you will not credit, I will not venture to note; and on days when I was inclined to feast, the addition of two or three pence procured a sumptuous fare with the accompaniment of a sauce which an alderman over his callipash might sigh for."[4]

Cheap bread does not appear to be a problem to the common man in the country. Heyne remarks that "the rewards or presents given to servants in India, though trifling in themselves, are in reality greater in proportion than those given in England or any other country in Europe." These were greater when compared in terms of the general price of necessaries.[5] The abnormally low wages of labour in the 18th century bear witness to the low costs of living. In Gujarat, late in the 18th century, the general payment of labour was from two to four rupees per month, and we learn that these wages were cheerfully accepted.[6] At Calcutta, about the middle of the century, the lower category of servants and labourers were paid from rupees two to rupees five per month.[7] About 1786, too, they were content with payments from Rs. 2 to Rs. 8.[8] The low prices of necessary goods are also a sound explanation of the cheap mode of life. In Gujarat, one maund of grain (about 34½ lbs) was sold "for three-fourths of a rupee.[9] The prices of provisions in the Mysore State too were equally cheap.[10] At the middle of the century in Bengal, we are informed that rice sold for 1 md. and 32 seers per one rupee and four annas, and wheat at the same rate. The prices

[1] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 485. [2] *Ibid.* [3] Stavorinus: *op. cit., III*, p. 219.
[4] Forster: *op. cit., I*, p. 75. [5] Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 294-95.
[6] Forbes: *op. cit., I*, p. 485.
[7] Ives: *op. cit.*, pp. 48-50. [8] Long: *op. cit.*, pp. 183-84.
[9] Stavorinus: *op. cit., II*, p. 456. [10] Heyne: *op. cit.*, pp. 63-66.

of grams and oils were also very cheap.[1] It is clear that in the 18th century labour was a negligible factor to count in the prices of goods and bare necessaries of life were easily within the reach of a man of moderate means. It can also be easily appreciated that in Indian society the standards of living could vary with even slight increase in incomes. The accounts of the period emphasize that these standards varied sharply among the different classes, and that there was hardly any meeting ground between the upper and lower sections of society. They also state that about half of the total population, including labouring and menial classes doing hardest manual labour, owned nominal property and were strangers to the comforts of a decent life. Their resources to stand on their feet in a period of acute economic crisis appear to be negligible. In Bengal in the terrible years of the famine of 1769-70, we learn that one third of the population was wiped out from the face of the earth and even upper classes were reduced to indigence. Much of the suffering of the people was, however, due to the inhuman ways of the Procrustean mechanism of British administration.[2]

The economic life of society during the 18th century was in transition. Till the middle of the century, India was a premier industrial country of the world, and her industrial and rural economy appear to be balanced. In the later half, the industries and industrial arts declined. The inevitable consequence was increase of poverty and intensification in the misery of the lower classes in society. According to Dubois, the collapse of the cotton industry was primarily responsible for increase of poverty under the British rule. On the eve of his departure to Europe in the early part of the 19th century, he observed that industrial workshops were closed, and desolation prevailed in the manufacturing districts. We may conclude this account with his observation:

> "Europe no longer depends on India for anything, having learnt to beat the Hindus on their own ground, even in their most characteristic industries and manufactures, for which from time immemorial we were dependent on them. In fact, the roles have been reversed, and this revolution threatens to ruin India completely."[3]

[1] Long: *op. cit.*, Extract No. 99.
[2] *Sixth Report*, Committee of Secrecy, 1773, pp. 300-01.
[3] Dubois: *op. cit.*, pp. 94-5.

# Selected Bibliography

IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY and later, there was prolific growth of foreign literature on India and after carefully ransacking it, it is not difficult to construct the social history of the people. A few observations, however, require to be made regarding the European sources. They lay stress only on the picturesque traits of Indian society and the complexities of the social and religious institutions of the people were almost beyond their comprehension. They did not compile their accounts in a spirit of scientific enquiry but mostly for their own recreation, for they tried to make their narratives as interesting as possible. Forbes confesses that he wrote his narrative to make it interesting to his countrymen, thus distinguishing himself from the sedentary composer. Moreover, it is also true, as Broughton tells us, that incidents, manners and customs of the people appeared "dull and uninteresting" to European residents in India. They also experienced many difficulties in gathering authentic information about the higher classes of society. Alexander Dow says that they mostly conversed with "inferior tribes", and with the unlettered part of society, and have naturally made many observations about society as a whole which are not to be totally accepted. The restrictions of caste on the free movements of Europeans in Indian social circles contributed to their ignorance on the subjects of Indian philosophy and culture. Most of the accounts merely record heresay evidence which is not reliable. Only those, like the memoirs and itineraries based on personal observation, are reliable but they are of limited applicability as they cannot be held valid for other regions. The generalizations of Europeans, based on observations of local customs or manners of certain classes, too, cannot be considered of all-India application. The character of society was essentially composite and generalizations about it are hazardous. The accounts of the Christian missionaries form a distinct class by themselves. The missionaries had a close mind and were not therefore qualified to appreciate social institutions unfamiliar to them.

Everything connected with India appeared as an "abomination of heathenism" to them and their writings convey a very distorted view of the life in the country. To them the Hindus were nothing but barbarians, "a people loaded with every kind of vice, without a single spark of virtue". They were interested in presenting a picture of "the wickedness and incongruities of polytheism and idolatry" in order "to set off the beauties and perfections of Christianity". "It was thus that the Lacedaemonians placed drunken slaves in the sight of their children in order to inspire the latter with a horror of intemperance", says Dubois, whose writings have been found indispensable for everything connected with Hindu society.

As such, the first task of the researcher working on these sources is to assess the real value of evidence available from them, and to sift fact from fiction. But the problem of selection and rejection becomes difficult indeed owing to the absence of reliable evidence of factual character. For the purposes of corroboration the official accounts are of little help. They deal at length with political, administrative and commercial subjects and fail to provide authentic information on life in society. As such, one has to cover up the widest range of contemporary material—the accounts of travellers, residents and missionaries, memoirs and diaries, parliamentary publications and official writings—and examine them in the light of the unity of our social history. Of contemporary sources, the enormous materials compiled by Buchanan (Hamilton) about the territories of the Company in the first decade of the 19th century is most reliable as it was firmly based on personal observation and enquiries. The French missionary, Dubois, deserves special mention as he compiled his account of Hindu life in South India after more than twenty years of active and intimate contact with the people. The accounts of travellers like Ives, Grose, Stavorinus, Forster, Hodges, Raynal, etc., and European residents like Scrafton, Rennell, James Forster, Robert Orme, Malcolm Craufurd, Colebrooke, Dow, Verelst, Vansittart, Elphinstone, Ali, among others, also supply us reliable information on many aspects of social life. The diaries of Ananda Ranga Pillai, the Dubash of Dupleix, a very servile and superstitous man, supply us good information on the superstitious beliefs of the people. Some of the other Indian writings

in Persian and vernacular languages also give us a good account of the manners and customs of the people. For judging the socio-economic consequences of British rule during the period, the Official writings have been found quite useful.

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